

**Monster Girl
Doctor (Light
Novel) Vol. 6**

Yoshino Origuchi

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BY YOSHINO ORIGUCHI
ILLUSTRATED BY Z-Ion

MONSTER GIRL DOCTOR

6

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6



BY YOSHINO ORIGUCHI
ILLUSTRATED BY Z-ton

*"It's okay to cry. Go ahead.
You should let it all out.
You can think about what
to do next later."*

*The lamia who
loves Glenn has
left his side.*

*Tisalia hugged Glenn. He couldn't
do anything but bawl like a child.
Arahmia embraced him from behind
with her four arms, as if hiding
him from other people's sight
while he sobbed.*



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VOLUME

6

STORY BY

Yoshino Origuchi

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

Z-ton



Seven Seas Entertainment

MONSTER MUSUME NO OISHASAN VOLUME 6

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Case 01: The Exhausted Scylla

It was almost autumn in the town of Lindworm.

It had been three years since Dr. Glenn Litbeit opened his clinic. This would be his third autumn there, and he'd worked himself to the bone for those three years. He was certain that this was what he was meant to do—continue examining and treating Lindworm's monsters as he honed his skills as a doctor.

Then he'd received a visit from his sister, Sioux. And then there was the fuss with the Barometz tree. That had been a crisis in and of itself, but the decision Sioux made in its aftermath left Glenn with an unprecedented dilemma. He'd never been in a situation like this before.

"There is nothing for me to do but find you a suitable wife, Brother," Sioux had declared. Glenn had no idea that that single utterance would completely flip his life upside down.

It was another restless night.

Glenn Litbeit already lived a life of exhaustion, and he usually fell asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow. He was always sleep-deprived, but he was a spry seventeen-year-old with endurance built over years working as a doctor, and a body with a high tolerance for the impossible.

However, there was a reason Glenn couldn't sleep tonight. It wasn't because Sioux's words kept replaying in his head.

"Aluloona, what's that?" asked one of the two interlopers in his bedroom.

"Perfume made from my pollen. They use it at brothels in the entertainment district. It's an extremely effective aphrodisiac... What is it, Number Two? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"I have a bad feeling about working with someone possessed of such an insatiable appetite."

"Excuse me? I'm pretty sure you were the one who proposed sneaking into this bedroom at night!"

"I am a free individual who does what they want. But I can't

determine whether this is appropriate for someone with authority in the city, like you, Aluloona.”

“You just say whatever you want, don’t you? The only person with authority here is Skadi. I’m nothing but a lady of the entertainment district.”

Glenn had no chance of falling asleep tonight.

“Hey, you two... What’s going on?” he finally asked.

“We’ve stolen into your room in the middle of the night, of course.”

“St-stolen into... How?”

“Your clinic connects to the canals so that aquatic monsters can access it, right? I transformed into a flower bulb and floated my way along the canals. Then, with the help of Number Two here, we unlocked the door and broke in,” explained Aluloona, second-in-command of the City Council.

Glenn eyed the perfume jar in her hand. It must have been that scent that had robbed him of his ability to reason.

“Moving silently, opening locks, sneaking into rooms—they’re all a piece of cake for me,” said Molly.

“Molly... You too?”

“This evil alraune lured me in. But I decided it was unavoidable, since it was an opportunity to work closely with you, Doctor.”

Molly Vanitas was in charge of the graveyard city. She was an amorphous shoggoth who used a skeleton as her frame. She didn’t have enough flesh to form eyelids, so her eyes seemed to roll around in her head, shining spookily in the dark. Perhaps her eyes reflected light, like a nocturnal animal’s, so that she could live easily in the graveyard city.

“Young doctor, it seems you’ll be taking a wife?” asked Aluloona.

“N-no, that’s a mistake. I have no intention of...”

“Hmm. But there are already rumors spreading through the town. We thought we should take you for ourselves before someone else gets to you.”

“Wh-what about my feelings? And dignity?”

“Don’t you see? Isn’t stealing into your room in the middle of the night the truest expression of our desire? Well, the perfume should have worked by now. Are you ready, young doctor?” Aluloona’s vines started to wrap around the immobile Glenn. The alraune’s green skin

glittered in the moonlight. She was famous for her appetites; if she set her sights on a man, he would be hers.

Meanwhile, Molly moved closer, her face expressionless. Her bones were visible through her translucent, purplish skin. She usually wore a nun's habit, but her outfit tonight seemed less modest than usual. Molly's clothing was also a part of her body, so she could change it at will.

"Hmph. Doctor, are you sure you don't enjoy this sort of thing?"

"E-enjoy? I wouldn't go that far."

"Fine, then. Hey, Number Two, do that thing that we talked about."

Molly's expressionless face seemed to twist just slightly in discontent. "I am still unable to determine whether it will be effective or not."

"You'll find out once you try it."

"Understood. This is also an interaction with Dr. Glenn."

"Mmm-hmm."

Molly shifted. The surface of her transparent skin rippled in waves, and her chest swelled. In contrast, her waist narrowed greatly.

"Heh. You're the same size as me now. How do you like it?" Aluloona sounded proud. The alraune's chest-to-waist ratio was incredible, and her figure was known to set off many people's libidos. Glenn wondered what it would be like if Molly, who could shapeshift, took Aluloona's form.

Aluloona pressed her bosom up against the two mounds that swelled on Molly's chest. She then offered Glenn the perfume jar.

"Why don't you take the jar, Doctor?"



“Aluloona, this is becoming a bit too much like one of the lewd games you play in the entertainment district.”

“It’s not *like* one of the games we play, it *is* one of the games we play. C’mon, Doc.” Two women in this position—with such exceptional bodies—was certainly an exciting sight.

Glenn was flummoxed. A normal man would undoubtedly have jumped at this opportunity. “Excuse me, but I’m not...”

“Hmm? What is it? Weren’t you just saying that you had no intention of marrying yet? So, why not play with us?” Aluloona was quick to reply.

“This...this is my workplace. Also, this isn’t very sincere.”

“It’s not good to suppress your desires, Dr. Glenn. Both your heart rate and body temperature are elevated. According to my analysis, you’re in an excited state.”

“Th-that may be true, but, umm...” Glenn glanced at the door. “Umm...maybe you should wrap things up?”

“Oh, and why is that?”

“Well, today...there’s a night shift working here.”

They heard the sound of hooves, followed by a neigh as somebody kicked the door open.

“Doctor, are you all right?!” exclaimed Tisalia.

Glenn could hear Sapphee’s voice as well. “Doctor, I could smell Aluloona’s flowers!”

The centaur and lamia made their way into the small room. They were greeted by the sight of two voluptuous women snuggling up to a man on the bed, his body in knots.

“Aluloona! And Molly, too?!”

“We’ve been found out. I determine that it is now impossible to proceed with a clandestine operation. That will be all.” Molly quickly came to a decision. She melted her body into a ball of slime instantly, scooped up her bones, and opened the window to escape. Perhaps that was how she’d gotten in as well.

“Hmph. Well, you’ve gone and ruined the atmosphere. I guess I’ll be on my way, too.”

“Yes, please go. Fairies! Our uninvited guests are leaving!”

Sapphee clapped her hands, which triggered a chorus of voices saying, “I’m sleepy!” and “What is it?” The fairies had clearly been sound asleep, but when Sapphee gave the order, they quickly gathered

around Aluloona's bulb. Heave, ho! They lifted her and carried her away.

"Please don't ever come back again!" Sapphee cried.

Aluloona moaned as she left; that was followed by a variety of strange sounds. Since this was her third attempt at sneaking into Glenn's room, it was probably safe to say that she hadn't learned her lesson.

"Doctor, are you all right?"

"Y-yes. Well, nothing happened." Glenn gave Tisalia a wry smile.

Ever since the rumor that Glenn was looking for a wife began to circulate through Lindworm, there had been a sudden surge in uninvited visitors to Glenn's room in the middle of the night. Aluloona made a habit of it. Molly sometimes showed up. Arahnia, too. Even Illy once flew right into the window, perhaps because she couldn't see as well in the dark.

Glenn couldn't take it anymore, so he'd asked Tisalia to stand guard. She couldn't come every night, since she had to be able to fight in the arena, but she was definitely a trustworthy guard.

"Doctor, I'll be by your side in a second. Until you decide who you'll marry, I won't let anyone touch you."

"That means you, too, Tisalia," Sapphee pointed out.

"I would never! That would be unbecoming before we're married!" Tisalia was appalled. "I have great respect for your celibacy, Doctor."

The sleep-deprived Glenn felt his eyes droop. Perhaps it was due to the potency of Aluloona's perfume, but a wave of sleepiness washed over him.

"Ohh..."

He heard Sapphee's voice in his dreams. "Doctor, I know you must be restless...but we're watching over you."

That makes it even harder to rest, Glenn wanted to say, but his words came out as garbled and incomprehensible sleep-talk.

"It's been rough on you, too," a sweet voice told Glenn.

Tentacles held the squid-ink pasta Glenn had ordered out to him. The cook grinned at Glenn, who sat at the counter for humans.

“No...” he replied. “I mean, it’s just been causing you trouble.”

“All I care about is that you eat and drink your fill, and pay what you owe. I’m more concerned about that corner over there. They’re talking about you, right?”

“Y-yes.” Glenn held his head in his hands.

“Marrying off a daughter can be scary business.”

The kraken madam, owner of the Giant Squid’s Inn, cackled. She balanced the dishes and drinks her customers had ordered on her ten tentacles. Thanks to the suction cups on those limbs, all the orders seemed steady and in no danger of falling.

“As long as they don’t bother the other customers. Make sure you taste some of my pasta before you go.” The madam gave Glenn a sweet smile and disappeared.

Glenn looked toward where the madam had indicated. The table in the corner of the Giant Squid’s Inn was occupied by women Glenn knew very well. They’d posted up a parchment sign that read, in messy handwriting, “Glenn Litbeit’s Marriage Conference.” The woman who’d penned the sign, of course, was none other than Glenn’s faithful assistant, Saphentite the lamia.

But why?

Why had it come to this?

“I’m telling you!” The women’s discussion suddenly rose in volume. “I won’t tolerate tossing out possible wives’ names simply for the fun of it! If you’re serious about wanting to marry Dr. Glenn, raise your hand!”

As she said this, Sapphee’s hand was already up higher than anyone else’s at the table. She watched Glenn’s daily interactions with women with an eagle eye because of her feelings for him—feelings even Glenn was well aware of. Still, he couldn’t help but think that Sapphee was taking it too far.

“Yes! Y-yes! Me too! I want to marry him! That’s right!” Tisalia made no attempt to hide her feelings.

“Okay, okay, the centaur princess, too. I know that already,” Sapphee said.

Tisalia was the heiress to a shipping firm, and had already made many proposals to Glenn. Consequently, Glenn was aware that the centaur—who’d brought two attendants to the meeting—was also very serious about her intentions.

“Um, er, I also...”

“Lulala, I hate to be the one to say this, but you’re still too young to legally marry.”

“Y-yes, I know that. I just thought I would say so.”

A simple canal ran through the Giant Squid’s Inn so that aquatic monsters could surface and eat at a special counter. Lulala sipped on a soft drink.

“What about you, Arahnia? You’re not interested?”

“Hmm? Me?” The arachne was enjoying some kind of foreign alcohol. “I don’t want to get hitched. It doesn’t matter to me who the doc marries.”

“Really?”

“Not a peep from me. Even if he has a proper wife, that doesn’t mean I can’t be a mistress. I don’t need to be a wife, but... Well, I have no objection to sneaking around, you know? There are actually polyamorous monster folk in Lindworm who aren’t too fond of the monogamy laws. Heh, how about some sister-wives?”

“Arahnia!”

“I’m only joking... Heh heh.”

The conference seemed like it might explode at any moment. Other attendees included Tisalia’s attendants, Kay and Lorna, and Illy the harpy courier. Many seemed to be there just for company; they were enjoying their meals.

There’re so many women here. Glenn stained his lips black as he slurped down the squid-ink pasta. He’d been aware of Sapphee’s and Tisalia’s feelings, but he was surprised to see Lulala there. A variety of gossip did the rounds of Lindworm, but Glenn had never thought that his personal life would be the talk of the town.

“So, it’s really down to whether Tisalia or I should be the bride,” Sapphee said.

“How do you propose we decide?” asked Tisalia. “A duel? I won’t be defeated.”

“I have no intention of losing, either, but I think we can find a more peaceful solution. We should, of course, consult Sioux.”

Glenn was relieved to hear that Sioux would have a say, but he wished they would also ask him—the groom!—to weigh in. Why was he eating alone, if he was the one to be wed?

No one had even bothered to ask him if he *wanted* to get married. At this point, all he could do was keep an eye on the arguing women.

The instigator of the whole mess interrupted his thoughts. "Brother, please allow me to join you!"

Sioux Litbeit sat next to Glenn at the bar. Two horns sprouted from her forehead, making it hard to believe that they were the same species.

Sioux must have been in the middle of her patrol. She ordered a pizza from the madam as if she was a regular customer.

"The conference is very lively!" she said.

"And whose fault is that?" If Sioux hadn't said that she would choose his bride-to-be, none of this would ever have happened.

"Hmph. Your words sting, Brother. It is not I who is worried about your marriage, but Father and Mother. Perhaps if you were more diligent in keeping contact with them, then..."

"I went against our parents' wishes by entering the Academy. I'm in no position to write to them now." Glenn's face was glum. This wasn't something he'd ever share with Sapphee, let alone his patients. He was a good physician, but he wasn't winning any awards with his family.

"But you know that Brother Souen is responsible for much of this," said Sioux.

"Yeah... That's true."

Souen was their eldest brother. He was cunning, and not only managed the Eastern Merchant Union as their father's successor, but also served as secretary for the elder statesmen. Souen was expected to take over the firm, but his competitiveness, responsibility, and ambition were strong enough that he seemingly always pushed his brother Glenn away. Glenn had no intention of challenging him, but Souen apparently had trouble accepting that there might be a candidate for succession besides him.

"When you said that you were going to apply for the Monster Academy, Brother Souen told all sorts of things to Father, and almost got himself banished!" said Sioux. "Now he's acting as if nothing happened, though."

"Well, there's no use discussing that now. Our brother wanted to be rid of me, and I wanted to leave. Our interests were in line."

Because of the commotion around his departure, Glenn couldn't bring himself to contact his parents. Even though they hadn't exchanged a single letter with Glenn, however, his mother and father could still take issue with his life choices—like who he would marry—through Sioux.

In other words, “It’s all our brother’s fault.”

“I don’t agree with placing all the blame on others, but there’s no avoiding it with Eldest Brother,” Sioux said calmly as she chewed the pizza that the madam had brought to her.

“What do you think, Sioux?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, about who I should marry.”

“What are you doing?! You shouldn’t ask me about such an important person!”

“Wait a second. You were the one who said you’d choose my bride! So, I want to hear your opinion.”

Sioux crossed her arms in a huff. Glenn hadn’t noticed her ordering it, but she took a gulp of the Fire Dragon Sake in front of her.

“Of course, the only person I look up to as a sister is Sister Saphentite,” she said. “Even if it was only for a short time, Sister lived in the Litbeit household. I believe our parents would also accept your union.”

“I wonder.” Their parents were relatively unprejudiced against monsters, as evinced by the fact that they’d allowed Sapphee to live in their house.

“However, Miss Tisalia has also been a fine instructor of late. She is a strong and beautiful noblewoman, and her family’s social status is respectable.”

“Hmm?”

“Oh, Miss Arahnia gave me a beautiful belt!” Sioux added. “And it was free! It is not a suitable accessory for patrol-team work, but anyone who gives clothing as a gift is a fine person.”

“Hmm?”

“Oh, and Skadi, Aluloona, and Miss Molly always provide me with snacks! Miss Lulala and Miss Illy speak to me often... Kay and Lorna gave me vegetables the other day...”

“Th-that’s very nice.” Sioux might as well just have said that every person in Lindworm was wonderful. Glenn wondered whether the people treating his sister well had ulterior motives. It was clear that the women believed the marriage talks were likelier to go in their favor if they had Sioux on their side. That probably wasn’t the only reason for their actions, of course—his sister was easy to win over with presents, and she wore her heart on her sleeve, so maybe some people genuinely only wanted to spoil her.

“So, in conclusion, I would be happy if all of them became my sisters!”

“Okay, I got it.” He “got” that his younger sister’s opinion was useless, that is. “Hey, Sioux, aren’t you in the middle of your patrol?” Glenn was desperate to change the subject rather than hear any more about how he should contact his family.

Sioux didn’t seem bothered. “That is accurate! Once I finish eating, I must return immediately.”

“I thought you were on the red-light district patrol team. What are you doing downtown?”

“We take shifts patrolling. I have performed well, but I am still a new recruit. I must learn Lindworm inside and out, so I requested the shift!” Sioux seemed pleased with herself. She stuffed the remaining pizza into her mouth. It sounded as if patrolling kept her busy; Glenn wondered whether she even had the time to pick a bride for him.

“Is Dr. Cthulhy back?”

“Now that you mention it, I saw the council members at the border. They looked to be resting, so perhaps the Draconess also arrived home.”

“I see. Thank you.”

If Skadi and Dr. Cthulhy had returned from their business trip to the east, then Glenn needed to stop by and say hello. He also needed to report on the sleeping-sheep incident that took place while they were gone. He needed Cthulhy’s cooperation to make sure that such an incident never happened again.

“Well then, Brother! Until later! Do not neglect to consider a suitable marriage partner!”

“I’m trying to tell you that I’m not interested in marrying yet.”

“Goodbye!” Sioux tossed some coins to the madam for her meal and disappeared as quickly as the wind.

“If you keep running like that, you’ll get sick again!” Glenn yelled after her, but Sioux was already out the door of the Giant Squid’s Inn and couldn’t hear him.

He took a drink of water and sighed. His sister wasn’t very helpful.

“What should I do?” He would have to take some kind of action, eventually, but he couldn’t figure out what.

Glenn looked up and saw Sapphee. “Dr. Glenn, I’ve been with you since we were children, and now I’m your pharmacologist. I’m

clearly the best companion—”

“Time is irrelevant!” cried Tisalia. “I can provide financial support for your clinic!”

“This isn’t about money, it’s about love!”

Sapphee and Tisalia both clasped their hands to their chests, fervently exclaiming why they would be the ideal bride for Glenn. He couldn’t help but feel bashful.

“You look troubled, Dr. Glenn,” said Sapphee later, as Glenn set out to do his rounds in the canals.

“Everyone’s so obsessed with marriage. I haven’t even proven myself as a doctor yet.”

“What does the one have to do with the other?”

“I just don’t have any intention of getting married so soon.”

“Dr. Glenn, I want to respect your feelings. However, if your biological sister asks you what your marriage plans are, it’s only natural for the women hoping to date you to feel excited.”

“I’m now acutely aware of that.” Glenn had thought that he could focus on the clinic for at least a few years before worrying about dating, let alone marriage. “Someday, I want to become independent of Dr. Cthulhy and start my own hospital. Still, I don’t actually want to be a dean of medicine. I hope to examine each individual patient.”

“So, you want to perform examinations yourself, Dr. Glenn?”

“Y-yes, I think so. Probably. I really think that going on rounds and speaking with patients is a better fit for my personality. I wouldn’t want to get married until later.”

Sapphee was nodding and sort of smiling. “That’s a separate issue. You can continue running your clinic even if you’re married.”

“It’s not that easy.” She was telling him to think about his dreams and marriage separately.

“Well, for now, please continue to do the work that best suits your personality.”

“I’ll do my best.” Glenn lowered himself into the canal.

Sticking her face out of the water was a young girl Glenn knew well. Beside the bright-faced, brown-skinned girl, two other mermaids sat on the canal ledge.

Lulala saw Glenn and smiled. "Sorry, Doctor. Thank you for making time."

"No problem. I can make calls anywhere in the city."

The other mermaids' facial features resembled Lulala's, but their skin was paler, and they were thinner. They seemed sickly.

"This is my mother and my younger sister." Lulala introduced them.

"So, this is the doctor. Thank you for coming all the way out here. I'm fine. Please examine my baby." Lulala's mother held a small, still mermaid in her arms. She seemed more concerned about her child than herself, but Glenn didn't intend on being anything less than thorough.

"I'd like to examine both of you."

"Thank you." Lulala's mother bowed her head in gratitude. Soula, Lulala's sister, had a vacant expression on her face.

Glenn examined them both, particularly their bodies' fish-like lower halves. Mermaid scales normally sparkled in sunlight, but when they were infected, even looking at them was painful. The infection wasn't serious; it was something like a rash.

"Doctor? What is it?" Lulala sounded worried.

"It'll be fine. With some medication, they should recover quickly."

"Really?"

"It seems that your mother and sister have very sensitive skin. Is that right?"

Lulala's mother nodded in response. "Yes. I'm from the deep sea. Soula got my skin tone. We don't tan the way that Lulala does."

"Soula's infection is more advanced than yours, but still curable with medicine. I'll write you a prescription. Please spend one hour in a sealed room to soak in the medicated bath."

Since mermaids lived in water, creams and ointments were generally useless to them. Most homes in the canals had a room for medicated baths, so Lulala's family just needed to soak there.

"Medicine... But isn't that expensive?" Lulala's mother looked at Glenn, concerned.

"It's true, it isn't cheap, but Lulala already paid the examination fee in full. So, you don't need to worry."

"Oh, um...is that so?"

“Hee hee!” Lulala grinned from ear to ear.

“Now, how to apply the medication...” Glenn began.

“Please, allow me to explain.” Sapphee slid into the canal so that the young Soula could hear her. “I’m the pharmacologist, Sapphee.”

It wasn’t particularly strong medication, but it had side effects. The most important thing was that if patients used the medication in the canals without the proper precautions, it could contaminate the water. Sapphee covered all this in her explanation. As he listened, Glenn thought about how easy she made it to understand, even for him.

“That’s how you use it. Also, if you happen to come to the water’s surface, please apply the ointment in this bottle to your skin directly.” Sapphee demonstrated how they could apply the ointment. She also had skin that didn’t do well in the sun, so she knew what the patients were going through.

Glenn was grateful that Sapphee was there. No matter how skilled he was at diagnosing issues, if patients didn’t use the prescribed medication, then it would all be for naught. Furthermore, certain medications could be poisonous if handled incorrectly. Sapphee not only had the knowledge to convey the necessary information to patients, but also the rare ability to make custom-compound medications to suit Glenn’s diagnoses. That was an indispensable skill that Glenn needed as much as Lindworm’s residents did.

It was Dr. Cthulhy, after all, who oversaw prescriptions at the Central Hospital. Dr. Cthulhy had wanted Sapphee to apprentice under her, but since Glenn was still inexperienced as a doctor, she assigned Sapphee to help him at his clinic.

However, Glenn couldn’t just stare goggle-eyed at Sapphee all day. He had his own work to do. “Lulala, can I speak to you for a minute?”

“Hmm? What is it, Doctor?”

“Have your mother and sister been working near the water’s surface lately?”

“Huh? No, they don’t really come to the land. Why?”

“A preexisting condition is one thing, but it’s strange to suddenly develop a skin disease. I thought there might be a reason.”

“Hmmm...” Lulala motioned for him to come closer.

She put a wet hand up to his ear and whispered to him.



“Well, actually...” She looked around to make sure no one was listening. “Lately, some people in our neighborhood have had problems with their skin and scales. I heard that the mermaid dancers have gotten rashes. I haven’t had any problems yet, but...in the canals, people say maybe it’s an infection.”

“The waterworks oversees the canal water. If there were an infection, the hospital would’ve heard about it.”

“Well, I know that, but...” Lulala look worried.

She had arranged today’s examination because she was worried about her family’s health. The young diva managed the household finances and was devoted to her family.

“Oh, Doctor?” Lulala suddenly raised her voice. “If you still don’t plan on getting married yet, can you wait two years?”

“Huh?!” This sudden change in topic caught Glenn off guard. Two more years. In other words, until Lulala was old enough to marry according to the city ordinances? Lulala giggled as if embarrassed, but her eyes were serious.

Glenn, who’d never thought of her as anything but a young singer, finally realized something as she volunteered herself to be his bride. Sapphee was right. He might not be ready, but things were changing. He had an important decision to make.

“Doctor, I’m finished,” Sapphee said.

“Oh, yes... I’ll be right there.”

It seemed as if Lulala wasn’t too concerned about receiving a reply. She’d already moved away from Glenn and was talking to her mother and sister.

When he’d first met Lulala, she seemed so much younger. Glenn was surprised at how quickly she’d grown up. He could say the same of Illy and Memé, who were the same age as Lulala, and even his sister, Sioux. He was so preoccupied with diagnosing illnesses that he sometimes forgot that his patients had lives outside their appointments with him.

Before his very eyes, these children were growing into young women. “Wow.”

“Doctor?” said Sapphee.

“Oh, it’s nothing. I need to concentrate, too.”

“Hmm,” Sapphee replied with a smile.

It might take him a while, but Glenn resolved to come up with an answer regarding marriage—an answer he was happy with.

Lulala waved to Glenn and Sapphee from the water's surface.

Two weeks passed, and the clinic grew extremely busy. There was a sharp increase in the number of patients, especially from the canals.

"Skin rashes, inflamed scales, white spots, sores on fins..." Dr. Cthulhy made a sour face as she looked over the report. "All the symptoms are similar. The cause could be poor water quality, or an infectious disease... I don't know, Glenn. This is a real problem."

Glenn had written the report Cthulhy held. After he examined Lulala's family, he'd seen a sudden increase in patients who resided in the canals. Just as Lulala said, all of them complained about skin ailments.

"How about the Central Hospital?" he asked.

"We have quite a few patients from the canals, but a lot more land patients are complaining of abdominal pain. There's been an especially high number of cases in monsters with weaker digestive functions. If this is a water-quality issue, it might be affecting the drinking water."

"That is a real problem."

"I set up an emergency medical bath in the canals. Can Sapphee prepare medication on direct order from Skadi? I've already asked Aluloona for the ingredients."

"Is this issue that bad?"

"Yes. But even if we give the aquatic monsters medicine, we'll only be treating the symptoms. We need to do something about the cause."

"So, that means..."

"I already asked the Kuklo Workshop to retest the water-intake equipment. If there's a problem with the water, the test will let us know."

The dean of medicine worked quickly. While Glenn was only just noticing that there was a problem, she'd already taken action on many fronts. Glenn wondered whether he could ever do that. No matter how much he thought about it, he couldn't truly imagine himself becoming Cthulhy's successor.

"Um, Dr. Cthulhy?"

“What?”

Glenn hesitated. “Perhaps this isn’t the best timing, but I didn’t come here to give you a report on the situation.” He could easily have sent it by post.

Cthulhy had stretched her tentacles out of her octopus pot to read the report, and the document’s edges were wet. Glenn had written it on sheepskin parchment, so it could stand up to a bit of water, but it wasn’t completely waterproof. Glenn wished she’d handle it with a bit more care.

“I heard that you weren’t feeling well, Dr. Cthulhy, so I rushed over.”

“Yes, it’s true. I’m just a bit run-down. Perhaps I’m working too hard.”

“I understand that you’re very busy. You must also be tired from your trip east. I can only do so much at the clinic. Please make sure that you get enough rest.”

“Can’t you see I’m resting now?” Cthulhy demanded. Glenn couldn’t see her face, so it looked as if the octopus pot was talking.

“I included this in the report, but many patients in the canals—the young and old—have weaker immune systems. If you’re exhausted, Doctor...”

“Are you calling me elderly?!” Dr. Cthulhy finally stuck her head back out. She was probably completely naked in her pot.

Attacking her age hadn’t been his intention at all. Glenn let out a sigh. “Please, just let me examine you. That’s why I came.”

“Okay, fine. Do whatever you want.”

“First of all, if you’re tired, how about a massage?”

“Who taught you that? I mean, I’m grateful, but...”

“I’ve been doing some studying lately.” Glenn chuckled, embarrassed.

In a previous examination, he’d discovered that massage was effective on Kunai, who was undead. That inspired him to take up new studies in treatment methods such as chiropractic, osteopathy, acupuncture, and moxibustion. Glenn was a busy man, but he found it enjoyable to learn new things.

“All right, then. That sounds nice.” A clump of tentacles waved from the octopus pot. Cthulhy headed toward the canal that had been installed just for her in the back of the dean’s office. She didn’t seem bothered by the fact that she was completely naked as she floated

sideways, her eight tentacles spread over the water's surface.

Glenn rolled up the hems of his pants and stepped into the water up to his knees. When he touched Cthulhy's tentacles, he noticed that her skin was a bit rough. Some spots were inflamed.

Is this exhaustion?

Glenn put all his strength into massaging Cthulhy's tentacle muscles.

"Mmm...ahhhh..." Cthulhy moaned.

Even though Glenn had once thought of the dean almost as family, whenever there was a naked woman in front of him, he found it hard to keep his eyes away from her...parts. He adjusted his gaze.

"Doctor, you have a rash. It also looks like your suction cups are inflamed. Are you overdoing it?"

"Hmm? Well, maybe." A tentacle tip wrapped around Glenn and squeezed him. The suction cups stuck to his skin, as always, but...

"It feels as though the suction is weaker than normal."

"Uh-oh..." Cthulhy covered her face.

Glenn wished she was more concerned about covering her body, but he knew that now wasn't the time to dwell on that. Normally, suction cups adhered strongly enough to be painful. The motions of the dean's tentacles also weren't nearly as precise as usual. The way she wrapped around him today wouldn't even leave a bruise—and Glenn was, by now, used to the bruises lamia scales and scylla tentacles left behind. He actually kind of missed that.

Okay, now I'm freaking myself out a bit.

He shook his head, wondering whether there was a single benefit to getting used to being bruised.

"Yes, I think you must be tired," said Glenn.

"That might be true. Ahh...I thought I was still young."

Glenn hadn't said anything about Cthulhy's age, but it seemed that to her, being tired meant being geriatric. She was visibly disappointed.

"I thought I was getting enough sleep."

With the increase in canal patients, and the dean's normal duties at the hospital, it was hard to believe that was true. "Perhaps you haven't recovered from your trip?"

"That can't be. I spent all my time in the east in the hot springs. All I did was relax. Skadi had no health problems, so it ended up

being a vacation for me.”

The eastern country was full of hot springs. Glenn was well aware of their medicinal effects. They were also supposed to be useful in alleviating fatigue, but Cthulhy’s skin infection was severe.

Aquatic monsters’ skin was covered with a slimy membrane that protected it from fresh and salt water. If the skin developed a rash, the membrane might rupture, and the patient’s bodily fluids would become unbalanced. Membrane problems were a serious affliction for aquatic monsters.

“Glenn... More... It’s not strong enough...”

“Okay, okay.” Glenn continued his massage as the tentacles wrapped around him.

“Ahhh, there... That’s good.”

“Why don’t you take a longer vacation?”

“Yes, yes. Once things have settled down. Stronger, right there. Ahh...mmm...good...” It seemed as if Cthulhy might fall asleep.

Glenn finished massaging each tentacle. He wasn’t used to putting this much muscle into his work, and he’d started sweating. Both his hands were wet from contact with Cthulhy’s membranes. “This completes the treatment. Doctor, your skin doesn’t look good.”

“I know. If you keep repeating yourself, I’m going to deduct one hundred points.”

“I think the rash is the root of the problem, and it’s causing you to tire easily.”

Cthulhy was silent.

“Your muscles are especially tense. Your suction cups are weakened. Therefore, you need to exert extra strength in everything you do. The result is excessive fatigue.”

“Ahhh.” Cthulhy closed her eyes.

“I think the best thing would be a medicated bath. But the medical baths in the canals are full of patients.”

“Hmph. Well, I have my own bath in the back here. I can just use that.”

“Right. Then I think you’ll be fine if you eat nutritious food and get lots of rest.”

“I’ll think about it.” Cthulhy was curt.

She might come off as lazy, sometimes, but Cthulhy had a strong sense of responsibility. She probably didn’t feel that she could leave

the really important work to Glenn. Even now, she refused to step down as Skadi's main physician. She occasionally mentioned retiring, but that still seemed a long way off.

"Well then, I'll be go—"

"Wait a second."

After wiping the membrane off both his hands and turning to leave the dean's office, Glenn was suddenly stopped by tentacles wrapping around his neck. "Argh!"

"Don't you need to clean up? Why don't you join me in the bath, like old times?"

"H-huh?! D-Doctor, I'm not a little child anymore."

"You're still a child to me."

Glenn noticed that Cthulhy still had her glasses on. Scyllas had poor vision, but used their tentacles to taste, smell, and sense things. Cthulhy probably preferred to wear her expensive glasses because of her position as dean of medicine.

"C'mon, Glenn, just this once?"

"D-Doctor! If I got into a bath with medicine made for a scylla
—"

"Then I won't put the medicine in. We'll just take a normal bath."

"But that defeats the purpose!"

Cthulhy had no intention of listening to Glenn's objections, and he felt her carry him into her private bathroom.

"Ahhhhh..." Cthulhy let out a deep sigh as she lowered herself into the water, pulling Glenn with her.

Scylla baths were quite large, and even with Glenn in the tub, there was plenty of room. Cthulhy had let him keep a towel wrapped around his waist, but she was completely naked. He wasn't sure where he should look, and he also didn't know what Sapphee would say if she saw him in such a state. He tried to keep his gaze pointed off into the distance.

"I didn't realize you liked baths so much, Dr. Cthulhy."

"The hot springs in the east felt so good, I decided to keep up the habit after I came back."

In an attempt to hide his body, Glenn kept as much of it under the water's surface as he could. Still, no matter what he did, every limb was within Cthulhy's line of sight, so he was stuck. Completely

stuck.

“On that note, I saw your brother, Glenn. Souen, was it?”

“Huh? Oh, umm...”

“He told me to tell you he said hello, and that he looked forward to continuing your relationship.”

Glenn chewed his lip, unsure of how to respond. As a merchant’s second son, Glenn had joined the Monster Academy against his parents’ wishes. His father had wanted him to use his talents to help his brother take over the family business. However, Glenn’s dream was to become a doctor. In the end, he’d cut off nearly all ties with his family to pursue that dream—at least until his sister had come to Lindworm.

“I, umm...don’t speak to my brother.”

“But your sister came here, right? And I heard all about this new marriage issue. You can’t really say that you have nothing to do with your family now, can you?”

“That’s...true.”

Glenn held his head in his hands. His brother was a rationalist and a merchant to his core. Souen was so cold-blooded that he had no problem cutting off family members if he thought they might disadvantage him. Still, as long as Glenn was in Lindworm, there was no chance of him running into his brother.

“He treated us to a very nice meal while we were there,” Cthulhy said.

“That’s because Skadi is a powerful figure in Lindworm. My brother will do anything if he thinks it will profit him.”

“So, that makes him a good politician.”

“I-I don’t know anything about politics.” Glenn focused on helping people. He wasn’t cut out for politics or business, but he had the perfect personality for a doctor. “I’m glad that you were able to relax on your trip, Doctor.”

“So am I. But now that I’m back, we have this water-pollution issue. What’s going on? The water flowing from the Vivre Mountains is supposed to be some of the clearest on the continent.”

“I’m not sure. We just have to put our faith in everyone at the Kuklo Workshop.”

“That’s true.”

Clean water was vital to urban development. If patients complained of abdominal pain, then that meant the problem—

whatever it was—might've spread to the drinking water...or even the water that Glenn was currently bathing in.

Is the water tingly? Glenn started to feel uncomfortable, as if something were pricking the body parts soaking in the tub. Perhaps Lindworm's water *was* abnormal. He stole a glance at Cthulhy. Her eyes looked drowsy, and he noticed for the first time that the glasses she wore were slightly tinted. The expensive designer frames had gold components.

Wait a second.

The prickly feeling.

The color of Cthulhy's glasses.

"Dr. Cthulhy...do you normally wear your glasses in the bath?"

"Hmmm? Of course not. Lately I've been reading while I soak, so I kept them on."

"What I'm trying to figure out is... Have you only worn these glasses when bathing in Lindworm's water?"

Glenn grabbed Cthulhy's glasses. She looked flustered, but he ignored her and focused on the frames. They seemed to be mostly gold, but there was silver on them as well. That silver had become discolored, making it easily distinguishable.

"Silver..."

Silver could discolor in sulfur's presence. Hot springs contained sulfur, so it was possible that Cthulhy had worn the glasses in the hot springs on her trip, causing the discoloration. However, other things contained sulfur, too. Silver cutlery was still popular among aristocrats because it made it easy to spot arsenic, since low-purity arsenic contained sulfur.

"Doctor, the silver in your glasses is tarnished."

"What?"

"Is it possible that the increase in patients from the canals is because...someone poisoned the water?"

There were fishing techniques that involved introducing poison directly into rivers to stupefy fish and make them easier to catch. Depending on the poison used, other living things might wind up casualties as well, so the effects on the environment were terrible.

What would happen if someone used that method in the canals?

What would happen if the canals, home to most of Lindworm's aquatic monsters, were polluted with poison?

“You can’t see well with your glasses off, so you wouldn’t have noticed it.”

“And I don’t own anything else with silver in it. Glenn, do you mean to say that this illness...was caused by unnatural means?”

“I’m not sure. This is still just a theory.”

Cthulhy was silent. She chewed the end of her tentacle, pondering. “The silver on my glasses frames became tarnished... That’s not much to go on.”

“True. But that’s why we need to investigate now. No one has died yet. Even if poison was introduced into the canals, it can’t be that strong. We need to act immediately!”

Cthulhy nodded. “All right. Let’s get a poison expert.”

She meant Sapphee. Sapphee had been raised to be an assassin, and she was a master at crafting poisons. If the canal water was toxic, she might even be able to use her pharmaceutical skills to concoct an antidote, once the poison was identified.

“But how could someone bring poison into Lindworm and get it past the city patrols?” Glenn asked.

“Figuring that out is Skadi’s job. Remember when we had the doppelgänger crisis? Things slip through the cracks. Our job is to do everything we can to make sure that there are no fatalities. That’s it.”

Glenn nodded. Even if the poison was weak, the fatal dose depended on the individual. It was entirely possible that children, the elderly, or people with diseases could end up dead. He thought of Lulala’s mother and younger sister.

“Huh?!” Cthulhy had bitten off her own tentacle. She spat it out and pointed at Glenn. “D-Doctor?!”

“It’s fine. It will grow back.”

Glenn had seen tentacles cut off with a knife before, but this was the first time he’d witnessed one being bitten off. Its tip was still wriggling around.

“If you’re going to investigate the poison, you’ll need a tissue sample soaked in the substance, won’t you? Take canal water and this tentacle to Sapphee right away. Hurry! If poison really is flowing through the canals, then we don’t have much time!”

“O-okay.”

“I’ll go tell Skadi now. This is an emergency. We’re about to get really busy.”

Glenn nodded. He’d wanted to discuss his potential marriage

with Cthulhy, but if this really was the crisis he feared, then they didn't have time for that. With the Draconess's surgery, the doppelgänger, the Barometz, and now the poisoned canal, Lindworm always seemed to be in crisis mode lately.

“Let's get this taken care of, Dr. Cthulhy.” He hurried to get dressed.

Interlude 01: The Litbeit Family

“Dammit!”

Souen Litbeit was in his office, trying to catch up on mountains of paperwork. The issue was that he had many job titles, and was therefore tasked with many duties.

First and foremost, he was head of the Litbeit household. He had inevitably inherited the duties of the Eastern Merchant Union, which came with a hefty amount of work. He also served as secretary to the elder statesmen. He'd been able to leverage his position as the commerce alliance's leader to establish this, but since his former superior was now imprisoned, all miscellaneous tasks were foisted onto Souen.

“Everyone just dumps their crap on me.” Souen was disgusted. In his opinion, both the merchant union and the council of statesmen were entirely incompetent. He found it astonishing that trade and politics made any headway in the country.

Souen wished he had someone to delegate work to, but that wasn't an option. To achieve his goals, he had to prove to the elder statesmen that he was useful. He couldn't risk losing their confidence by slacking off.

“Excuse me, Mr. Souen.” A maidservant opened the wooden sliding door and entered the room.

“What is it? Can't you see how busy I am?”

“A messenger brought a letter.”

“What messenger? From where?”

“The letter's from the western monster realm. The messenger was a lamia.”

Souen scowled. The only lamia he knew was that girl who'd lived with them at their estate. His younger siblings were close to her, but he'd never liked her.

“The messenger dropped off the letter and departed.”

“Give it here.” Souen took the message and looked it over. “One thing after another.”

“What is it?”

“Nothing. Just more cumbersome tasks. Now I have to send

undercover agents to Lindworm.” Souen pulled at his hair.

The astute maidservant narrowed her eyes. “Because you’ll be going as well?”

“I haven’t decided yet.”

“I’ll make preparations for the trip.”

Whether or not the maidservant had been listening, it seemed she’d already decided that Souen would go to Lindworm. She closed the sliding door, her footsteps echoing down the corridor.

Souen shook his head. She never listened to him.

“Unbelievable. Why do I have to deal with the Neikeses now?”

The seal on the envelope was a snake wrapped around a medicine bottle. It belonged to the Neikes family, an ally of the Litbeits. They probably sent it to him because he’d taken over as head of the household.

“It’s addressed to Glenn, too... Well, he doesn’t need to know that.”

Souen was already coming up strategies to tackle the task ahead. He always weighed his options and selected the most appropriate one, especially now that he possessed more information than anyone else. But how to use this information? What should he share, and what should he keep to himself?

“Dammit! It looks like I really will have to go to Lindworm.”

It was unavoidable. He had no choice but to leave his multitude of tasks to someone else. If the letter’s contents were true, then trouble was brewing in Lindworm.

“I need to check with the elder statesmen,” Souen sighed.

On the other hand, he decided, maybe a business trip would be more relaxing than being buried in paperwork. And maybe he’d get a chance to see his younger siblings, whom he hadn’t visited in some time.

“I can’t wait to see the looks on their faces.”

Souen chuckled to himself as he imagined the disgust his brother and sister would greet him with.

Case 02: The Centaur Rendezvous

The report that the canals were poisoned spread throughout Lindworm quickly on a City Council bulletin. In accordance with Skadi's instructions, the public relations division used careful wording to convey the information. The bulletin called for calm actions without causing panic. It claimed that the poison was extremely weak and wasn't dangerous to otherwise-healthy aquatic monsters. It advised children, the elderly, and those with weak immune systems to take refuge in the temporary shelter set up in the Vivre River.

Since there were still no fatalities, the City Council directed efforts to monitor the canals' water quality and investigate the cause of the poisoning. In the meantime, to be on the safe side, the bulletin recommended only drinking water that a slime monster had tested. Some residents went all the way to the harpy village in the Vivre Mountains to collect water. There was already confirmation that the water there wasn't contaminated.

Skadi gave a speech in the town square encouraging everyone to act calmly. It helped that there hadn't been deaths yet. Still, it was hard for residents to shake the shock of poison flowing through the canals. After only just resolving the Barometz issue, Lindworm was still on edge. There was a rumor that the Aluloona Plantation crops were contaminated, and whispers that the poison was the work of agents from the human realm who wanted to start a war.

Something had to be done as soon as possible. That forced the council members, including Skadi, to take strategic steps immediately.

Water flowed into the canals from a huge intake gate on Lindworm's north side. The gate had been built because the canals' water level differed from the river's, and it used the latest technology available in Lindworm, no expense spared. Today, Glenn was visiting the water treatment center, which was part of the intake gate, with cyclops from the Kuklo Workshop. The treatment center cleaned river water to improve aquatic monsters' quality of life.

Glenn barely understood the process. The machine seemed complicated at first glance, but in actuality, it was a simple device that ran the water through a filter. Normally, water went through the treatment center's core and filtered through the inner parts before coming out into the canals. However, its flow was currently stopped. The cyclops busily inspected the filter and took it out for a closer view.

“Memé, how does it look?”

“Can’t you see that I’m working right now?!”

That was the response Glenn got when he tried speaking to a cyclops he knew well. But he didn’t mind. She was always like this.

The City Council also issued an emergency notice ordering severely ill patients to be transported to, and treated at, the Central Hospital. Cthulhy was in charge of this operation. The patrol team, meanwhile, was instructed to apprehend the poisoning culprit as soon as possible. This meant the city crawled with uniformed patrol team members at all hours. Even volunteer warriors from the arena helped the search.

The Litbeit Clinic was tasked with identifying the poison and investigating the method in which it was distributed. Glenn had joined the Kuklo Workshop cyclops at the water treatment center because Sapphee instructed him to.

“If the poison ran throughout the entirety of the canals, it makes sense that it would’ve been added to either the intake gate or treatment center,” Sapphee had said. “At least, if I were the culprit, that’s how I would’ve done it.”

That’s why Glenn and the cyclops were there.

“E-everyone is so mad,” Memé stammered, “including the boss, so I need to concentrate! Trust me!”

“I trust you. I know how hard cyclops work. I would never doubt you.”

“B-but if you keep staring at me, it’ll make me nervous!” Memé looked as if she was about to cry, but she continued to carefully check every inch of the filter. “I-I think the device is...fine. I mean, the cyclops test and examine it regularly.”

“Is that so?” said Glenn. “Well, it doesn’t hurt to investigate.”

“I know that. W-well, the cyclops are working in full force, and we’ll tell you if there’s anything wrong.”

If they could just find a clue, something that led them to the culprit, Skadi, Kunai, and the patrol team would take care of the rest. Glenn hoped that no more monsters would be afflicted by this poison.

“Ah!”

“Memé?”

“Ah, ah, ah, ah!”

Memé’s voice shook. At first, Glenn thought that she was having one of her fits, but the cyclops girl plunged her hand into the filter

mechanism with a nimbleness she was normally incapable of. She pulled out something that looked like a purple jewel.

“I-I found it!”

“Memé! That’s poison! Be careful!”

“I-I-I know that! That’s why I have mercury here! Heh.”

Memé put the jewel-like object into a glass bottle she’d prepared and quickly sealed the bottle with a cork. That was still risky, but she wore thick gloves and seemed to be fine. She took off the glove she’d used to touch the poison and put it into another container. She’d probably burn it later.

“What kind of poison is it?!” asked Memé.

Glenn saw that the object held just a bit of purple liquid. It looked like a jewel, but perhaps it was a special container designed to let the poison within gradually seep out.

“Hmm...” The purple stone was diamond-shaped and cut beautifully. “A poisonous metal? No, I don’t think so. Is this venom?”

“D-Doctor, you don’t know?”

“Well, I don’t really have much knowledge of poisons. My guess is that an expert with a lot of experience in their field created this to spread poison throughout the canals.” Whoever made the jewel was no novice.

“When did this... How did... We inspected the treatment center every single day. There’s no way we wouldn’t have noticed.”

“Well, let’s start by showing this to Sapphee. She’s an expert.”

Had the object been at the treatment center the entire time? It seemed as though it was left there, on purpose, to be found by a cyclops. Glenn felt that something sinister was going on behind the scenes, and it made his spine tingle.

“W-well, I’ll keep looking! If there are more of these jewels, then the cyclops’ reputation is on the line! Even the boss and my grandfather will keep going! That’s okay, right?”

“Look at you, Memé, you’ve really grown up!”

The cyclops, including the boss, laughed at Memé’s excitement. Perhaps they saw her as a child, and were pleased with her newfound maturity. Memé didn’t seem bothered, though. She looked around at the other workers with her single, large eye.

“There’s poison in my friend Lulala’s home! Of course I’m angry! I’ll never forgive whoever did this!”

“Ohhh! You’re right! All Lindworm’s residents are our friends. Now, let’s get ’er done. Put your back into it!” The cyclops cheered in response.

This lifted morale immediately. The cyclops were diligent workers, even before factoring in the blow to their pride that came with the poison at the treatment center getting past them. However, despite their collective efforts, they found no additional poison that day. Glenn wasn’t ready to believe that the toxin affecting the entire canal system came from a single object that fit in his hand.

Still, at least they’d been able to find a sample of the poison. Glenn was confident that if anyone could identify the culprit from that, it was Sapphee.

“The poison derives from a bioconcentration,” Sapphee said, a report in hand. They stood in her pharmaceutical office. Sapphee normally wore her nurse’s uniform, but because she was handling poison, today she wore a mask and gloves. She removed the mask as she read the report aloud.

A week had passed since they discovered the poison. The increase in patients had suddenly stopped. Drastically fewer aquatic monsters complained of skin and respiratory problems, and significantly fewer terrestrial monsters complained of abdominal pain—which could mean the poison had disappeared from the drinking water as well. In other words, the diamond-shaped container that Memé had found was the source of the poison affecting all the canals.

“Bioconcentration?”

“Yes. For example, one type of venomous frog actually isn’t toxic in and of itself, but since it eats poisonous ants and ticks, venom builds up in its body and becomes deadly.”

“So, um...the poison was extracted from something?”

“That’s right. Some venomous monsters—like the extremely rare man-tiger species—spend years collecting poison they’re resistant to. This creates a concentration of poison in their body that would never occur naturally.”

Glenn remembered the ominous purple poison in the waterways.

“There’s also a venomous subspecies of lamia. One ancestor of the Neikes clan was a legendary assassin who continuously ate poison so that it permeated her entire body. They say she could kill anyone

she even breathed on.”

“Wow... It’s hard to believe that someone so dangerous could come into Lindworm.”

“Well, that’s only a legend. They say that her poison glands were so overdeveloped that her entire body looked as if it was covered with tattoos. Characteristics that visible would make for quite an ineffective assassin.”

“Y-yes.”

Lindworm’s border was relatively lax, but although the city allowed merchants and tourists to pass freely, there was still a checkpoint. Whoever brought this poison in must have disguised it cleverly.

“The main thing is that this poison can’t be made using normal methods. It’s extremely potent. Furthermore, the container’s still quite full. I don’t think it was exposed to the water.”

“Huh?” That didn’t make sense. The poison had been discovered in a filter at the water treatment center.

“I think that it was originally somewhere else, and was moved on purpose to a place where it would be discovered easily. If it were in the water treatment equipment the entire time, there would’ve been much more poison in the water—and far more victims.”

“Wait a second... So, that means—”

“The offender is adjusting the amount of poison, making sure that no one dies. They planned for Memé to find it. My guess is that they won’t spread more poison in the water.”

Though Sapphee had chosen to become a pharmacologist, as a descendant of assassins, she was well versed in their methods. She made it sound as if whoever concocted this poison plan was also extremely skilled in the craft.

“I’ll notify Cthulhy of what we’ve found so far,” Sapphee said.

One of the fairies accepted the report that Sapphee held out with her tail. It would deliver the message immediately and directly to the Central Hospital. Fairies were often faster than the mail system.

“Since this poison is a bioconcentration, I think I can figure out what type of monster it came from if I dig a bit deeper,” continued Sapphee.

“Really?”

“Yes. If I spend more time on it, I should be able to figure out whether it was from a toad, man-tiger, one of the lizardfolk, or even a

venomous lamia. Hopefully, that will help lead us to the culprit.”

“Thank you. I’m sure it will help the investigation.”

Sapphee’s expression didn’t soften. It must have been a really dangerous poison. It was hard for Glenn to fathom that someone would actually do such a thing. The poison was designed to harm—the polar opposite of his mission as a doctor.

“Anyway, I’ll keep researching.”

“Yes, please.” Glenn nodded. The number of patients had decreased, and his role as a doctor in the canal crisis was winding down, but the work of the Lindworm City Council and patrol team was just beginning. No one would truly be safe until the culprit was caught. “Hey, Sapphee.”

“What is it?”

“Whoever contaminated the canals... They’re experienced, right? They’re keeping a step ahead of us and making sure that there are no fatalities. So...what’s their goal?”

“I don’t know, but poison isn’t something that just anyone can use. One mistake, and the poisoner will die. They’re handling this substance with care. Like me, they must be an expert in the use of poison.”

“So...”

“Yes. I think it could be a professional assassin.”

Glenn finally understood why Sapphee looked so concerned.

“I don’t know why they lowered the amount of poison, but whoever did this could cause a massacre if they wanted to. I included all that in my report.”

“I-I see.”

“The rest is up to the patrol team, Doctor.”

Glenn thought of his sister, who worked on the patrol team. Although he had every confidence in Sioux’s abilities, it was a different story when he thought of her up against a professional assassin. She would have the upper hand when fighting face to face, but if the attack came from behind...

“Also, Doctor, Illy delivered a letter for you.”

“Oh, right. From who?”

“Lady Scythia.”

Glenn took the letter, which bore the Scythia family’s crest.

Sapphee’s eyes narrowed. Glenn quivered.

He knew how jealous Sapphee was. Tisalia, the young lady of the Scythia family, had repeatedly made passionate advances toward him.

Glenn opened the envelope under Sapphee's heated, jealous stare. "It seems it's an application for a formal marriage interview."

"Oh."

"A marriage interview...at a café?" The request itself wasn't strange, but the location seemed inappropriate. "What do you think?"

"No idea." Sapphee's tone was cold, but her gaze remained fixed on the letter in Glenn's hand. "Why don't you meet her? To go to the trouble of writing a letter in this day and age, she must be getting desperate."

"Desperate..."

Sapphee was acting strangely today.

Her expression was stern, and her words were icy. She seemed... detached. She had to continue testing the deadly poison from her office, and to take care to do it safely. Maybe that was why she was on edge.

"I don't know what Tisalia is thinking, either," Sapphee said. "So, why don't you meet with her and listen to what she has to say? How about it, Doctor?"

Sapphee stroked Glenn's cheek with the tip of her tail. Glenn couldn't read her intentions.

"Well, I'll get back to my investigation," she added.

With that, Sapphee ended the conversation.

"I'm sorry to call you here while you're so busy," said Tisalia.

She was waiting at the café in the central courtyard. Instead of sitting on the terrace, she sat in the corner of the café. The letter she'd sent hadn't included any details besides the date, time, and location—it even said that Tisalia would wait for a number of days if Glenn didn't show up. He couldn't very well refuse such a strong invitation.

"Oh, no..." said Glenn. "Well, um..."

"Actually, this isn't a marriage interview."

"I...thought so."

The central courtyard café was definitely too casual for a

marriage interview. Clad in her normal body armor, Tisalia was drinking vegetable juice, and wasn't dressed for a special occasion at all.

"So, what is it, then?"

"It's about the canals."

"Oh?!" Glenn's expression changed.

"I have something urgent and important to tell you. I felt this would be the best way to speak to you. I thought you needed to know."

"What do you mean?"

"I witnessed a suspicious person in the canals. Oh...we need to be quiet." Tisalia put her finger to Glenn's lips before he could reply. "I haven't verified it yet. It wasn't actually me who saw them... It was Lorna." Tisalia had moved her face close to Glenn's and was now whispering.

"What about the patrol team?"

"I'm going to report it to them now. But I wanted to tell you first, Doctor."

"Why me?"

"Lorna said she saw a suspicious shadow near the canals. It was a human man, and his clothing was from the east."

Lindworm was located on the border of the human and monster realms. Eastern culture was a big part of the city, and the Radon Entertainment District was even built in the eastern style. Some monsters, like Memé and Arahnia, often wore eastern clothing. Yet what Tisalia described was still out of the norm.

"What made the man suspicious?"

"She said that he walked without making a sound. Lorna also has that skill, and she has very sharp intuition. A normal tourist wouldn't walk like that, would they?"

"You're right." Glenn was interested in how a centaur could walk without their hooves producing sound, but he pushed his own curiosity aside and concentrated on what Tisalia said.

"Doctor, there's a rumor that someone powerful in the east gave the order to poison the canals."

"Y-yes, I've heard that rumor as well."

Lindworm had only just recovered from the Sheep Sleep epidemic. The fact that the disease was caused by the Barometz tree,

which was brought to town by an eastern official, was all anyone talked about after the fact. Perhaps this poison was also the work of a human who hated monsters? It wasn't hard to understand why Lindworm's residents were suspicious of everything these days.

"I think the rumors say the council of statesmen gave the order. Glenn, isn't your brother an eastern official?"

"Thank you for your concern, but my brother isn't involved. He would never do anything to put himself at risk."

"Oh, I see."

Glenn finally understood why Tisalia had called him to the café in secret under the guise of a marriage interview. She was worried. If there was even a small chance that Glenn's brother, Souen, was involved in poisoning the canals, the blame might extend to Glenn as well.

"Also," Glenn added, "I think the poison might be unrelated to the human realm."

"Wait... Why?"

"Well, it seems the poison was concentrated in a monster's body. In other words, there's a high possibility that whoever used it was a monster."

"O-oh, is that so? I can't believe it. I wonder what species. May god punish them."

"Well, I'm sure Skadi will take care of that."

Humans of the east wouldn't know how to use poison derived from monsters. Not only was the human realm extremely discriminatory against monsters, most of its citizens were completely ignorant of them.

"Well, I just wanted to tell you that. I'm very sorry that I called you here under the pretense of a marriage interview. Did Sapphee say anything to you?"

"She just said that I should meet you and talk to you."

"I see." Tisalia lowered her eyes and drank her vegetable juice. "That reminds me, Doctor, did you decide on a bride?"

And there it was. The topic couldn't be avoided.

"No, not yet... I really don't have any intention of getting married."

"I'm quite serious."

Tisalia looked at Glenn sharply with the same expression she

used when battling in the arena.

"If it's what you want, Doctor, you can refrain from taking the name Scythia. I can protect the Scythia name and business. I want you to live as you please."

"Tisalia?"

"That's my answer to what Arahnia said."

Tisalia still seemed hung up on what had happened in the harpy village, when Arahnia accused her of looking for a husband for her family. That was how Arahnia, who hated weapons, chose to do battle instead—with words. Apparently, this was a sensitive point for Tisalia.

"So, please, consider me," she added.

"Tisalia, how many times do I need to tell you? I'm still training."

Tisalia's profession of love was moving. If she was willing to go this far, then Glenn needed to be sincere in his reply. Still, he'd already decided what the answer would be.

"Honestly, I feel as though this is premature," he continued. "However..."

"However?" Tisalia was dead serious.

"When the time does come, there's only one woman who I want to be with." Surely Tisalia knew who he referred to.

She let out the smallest sigh and gulped down the rest of her vegetable juice. "Hmm."

"I'm sorry. That's the only answer I can give you."

"What? I don't want you to apologize. I actually feel better. That was what I expected the doctor I know, my beloved Glenn, to say."

Glenn was taken aback. But Tisalia was right. If he were ever to tie the knot, he only had one candidate. His mind was already made up. It had taken Sioux bringing up the subject of marriage, and Tisalia's profession of love, for him to finally realize it.

There was no question. Glenn had always been in love with one person.

"It's fine. This is surely the correct outcome for my love. I fought in my own way, and this is the result."

"Tisalia, I..."

"You don't need to say it. Any more talk of this would be senseless."

Glenn couldn't give Tisalia the answer she wanted. But it was

strange; she didn't seem angry or sad. Was she acting happy because she didn't want to play the part of the rejected woman? It didn't seem that way.

Still, Glenn was certain she was putting on some sort of act.

"Then again, if you *are* feeling guilty..." she continued.

"Huh?"

"Would you go on one date with me?"

A date.

When Tisalia made the suggestion, Glenn wasn't able to agree right away. Lindworm was still in crisis. He didn't know when the next patient would come in. He couldn't just leave the clinic unstaffed.

However, he couldn't shrug off Tisalia's request for just one date, either. And if Tisalia said this would help her to get over her feelings for Glenn...

He was at a loss. He decided to consult Sapphee.

"Why in the world would you ask me whether you should go on a date with another woman?"

Glenn was used to Sapphee's anger and frustration, so he knew that all he could do was apologize. The fairies jeered at him, calling him dumb, pathetic, and hopeless, and Glenn had no defense.

"I would have to leave the clinic, so you'd need to be here," Glenn explained.

"You have no problem leaving the clinic when you make your rounds, but if you want to go out with a woman... Let it be known that Dr. Glenn must bow to me every single time he goes on a date! Well, that's interesting. Oh, this is fun!" Sapphee's words dripped with sarcasm. She wasn't smiling.

Until today, Glenn had thrown all of himself into studying medicine. As a result, he was woefully ignorant of other things. For example, he had no idea what he should do right now.

"Well, it's fine," she added.

"Sapphee?"

"Don't look at me like that, please. I never said you couldn't. I don't think Tisalia asked you out to try to beat me at something. Go ahead. I'll watch the clinic."

This was strange. Glenn glanced at Sapphee's tail, but there was no sign of quivering or anything resembling anger.

"Thank you, Sapphee."

"See you later. Have fun."

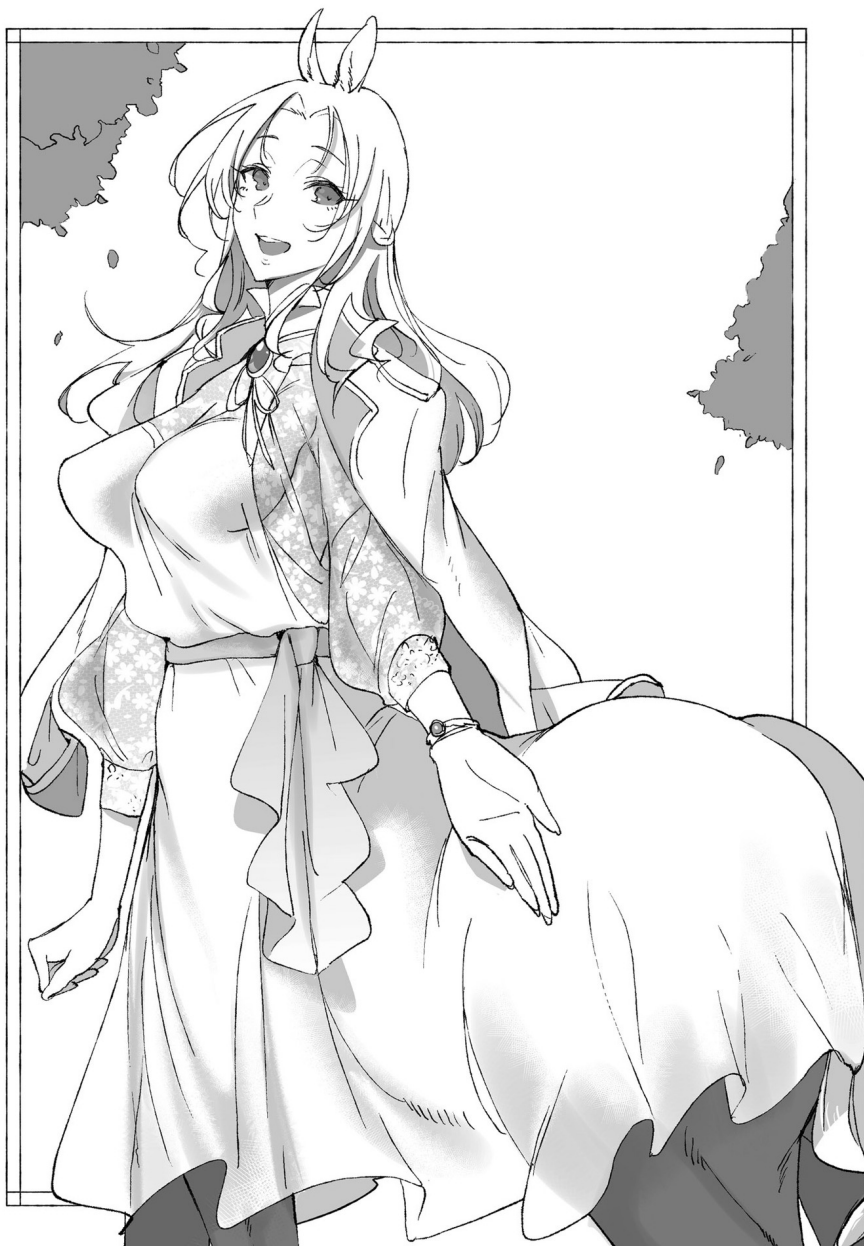
If Glenn were being honest, he would've admitted that he'd rather go on a date with Sapphee. He wanted to tell her all about his feelings for her, but he didn't feel like this was the right time.

So, after his conversation with Sapphee, he met up with Tisalia. He'd replaced his lab coat with a nice jacket. He wondered whether Sapphee would be all right in the clinic. There was still the poisoned-water issue, and the clinic was quite busy. However, Sapphee had told him to leave it to her.

Kay and Lorna had visited the clinic a number of times to choose a day when there were relatively few appointments. Glenn met Tisalia in the central courtyard, and that was that.

This was the only way Glenn could respond to Tisalia's desires, and he'd resolved to at least have a day of fun with her.

"Doctor!" A voice called across the square. Tisalia, all dressed up, waved her hands. She wasn't in her normal warrior attire. She was much taller than Glenn, but also looked quite feminine today.



“Your clothes are so pretty, Tisalia.”

“What?! Thank you... You know, I thought that I should get dressed up.”

It seemed as though her attendants had picked out her outfit. They knew her very well. Tisalia’s cheeks flushed; Glenn’s heart ached. He’d decided on his one and only, but that meant he had to refuse this wonderful person, and he was genuinely sad about it.

“Shall we go, then?” asked Tisalia.

“Oh, yes. Sorry, I didn’t think about what we should do.”

“Tee hee! I would never expect that of such a busy doctor.” She pulled Glenn’s arm.

The clop of her hooves was relaxed, and she seemed to adjust her normal gait to match Glenn’s, which was much shorter.

“Thank you so much for accepting my invitation today. I’m so happy, I feel like I could fly.”

“No, er...it’s my pleasure...” Glenn stammered out a reply. He wasn’t quite able to bring himself to say that he was happy to go on a date with her as well. He’d rejected her, after all.

While he pondered how to convey this to Tisalia, she spoke up. “Dr. Glenn.”

She usually called him “Doctor.” This might’ve been the first time she ever called him by name.

“I’ve always loved you, Doctor. Ever since the first time you treated me. It was thanks to you that I reached the second rank as a fighter. I can’t tell you how grateful I am, and I’m even more full of love for you—”

“Tisalia...”

“As you know, I have a lot of responsibilities in my life. I bear my family’s legend, pride, and business, and my parents’ expectations, as well my attendants’ lives and happiness. Then there are my friends, too.” She was probably referring to Sapphee. “But, right now, please let me forget all that and just be Tisalia, out with Dr. Glenn.”

She smiled. When Glenn saw that, he decided that today, he would think of nothing but Tisalia.

It was the only thing he could do for her now.

That day, Glenn and Tisalia enjoyed Lindworm.

Tisalia took him to the arena and showed him the spear she normally used. She let him try swinging it in the wide practice area. However, although it was only a practice weapon, it was made for a centaur and extremely heavy. Glenn couldn't even attempt to swing it.

In the canals, they searched for souvenirs. They saw glass art in one stall, and Glenn had to stop Tisalia from buying out all the stands. He suggested they walk to the graveyard city, but Tisalia shook her head—her eyes brimming—so they didn't. When she was in the arena, she looked fearless, but she seemed afraid of the undead.

They were about to visit the history museum near the City Council, when...

"Is it raining?"

"It's just a quick shower."

They ran to the museum, but by the time they got there, Glenn was soaked to the bone. Tisalia's expensive-looking outfit was also drenched. She wore a white blouse, so her chest was visible through the sheer fabric. Glenn didn't know where to look.

"T-Tisalia... Do you have something to wear over your shirt?"

"What? Why?"

Glenn couldn't bring himself to tell her that her clothing was see-through. Tisalia was known for being careful about her appearance, but it seemed that, for the first time, she hadn't noticed something about her clothes. She was probably focused on what they should do now that it was raining.

Two centaurs with umbrellas appeared.

"We're sorry to interrupt."

"It looks like you're having a wonderful time."

"Kay?! Lorna?!" Glenn exclaimed.

"My lady, it's time to change your clothes."

"Doctor, won't you please come this way?"

Tisalia's attendants must have been following them. A driver stood in the rain beside a nearby centaur carriage, waiting for Tisalia. She would probably change in there.

For some reason, Lorna also had a jacket for Glenn to change into. This went above and beyond the call of duty, but Glenn accepted the coat with gratitude.

"Th-thank you."

“Not at all.” Lorna laughed gracefully.

Tisalia’s attendants always worried about their mistress’s affairs, and were never far from her side, in one way or another.

“Were you following us the entire—”

“Don’t be silly. We would never get in your way. It’s just that, for some reason, many Scythia employees have the day off. They seem to be out enjoying the town.”

In other words, the employees were watching them everywhere. That was how much respect the beloved Tisalia had. It was her personality, not her family or position in society, that made her so adored.

“Doctor.” It was Lorna again. She whispered in a voice that only Glenn could hear. “The lady was at a complete loss about what to do until today. I won’t say much, but she made a difficult decision before joining you for this date.”

“A complete loss? Why?”

“That’s a secret. But, please, do what you can to cater to the lady’s feelings.”

At first, Glenn thought Lorna meant that she wanted him to make Tisalia feel better after rejecting her. However, he got the feeling she meant something else—something you wouldn’t normally ask the rejecter to do. Her words were vague, lacking any useful details. Considering Lorna’s position, she had every right to blame Glenn for Tisalia’s feelings, but she didn’t.

“Oh, it looks like the rain has stopped,” noted Lorna.

It had been a short shower. Soft sunlight fell on the road, which was still wet from the rain. A small rainbow appeared off in the direction of the Vivre Mountains. Glenn noticed a harpy’s silhouette fly in front of the rainbow. He couldn’t be sure, but it might have been Illy.

“D-Dr. Glenn... I apologize for making you wait.” Tisalia came back in fresh clothes. Her face blushed. “I’m so sorry. I told my attendants that I wouldn’t be needing them today, but...I never imagined they would show up here.”

“It was just a coincidence, my lady.”

“Yes. Don’t think that we were watching you.”

“Then why did you have everything on hand?!” asked Tisalia. “Unbelievable!”

It must be embarrassing to be seen by your family on a date,

Glenn decided. Tisalia's attendants and the Scythia Transportation employees were like family to her. In contrast to Tisalia, who was red with shame, Kay and Lorna's faces were satisfied. Glenn even thought they might be smiling slightly.

"Shall we change our plans?" asked Tisalia.

"Huh?"

"There's a rainbow. We could go someplace where it's easier to see. Maybe the tower by the City Council? Let's go before it disappears."

"Oh, yes."

Even if he couldn't return her feelings, Glenn thought, he should feel honored that a woman like Tisalia would be interested in him. Instead of worrying all the time, he should be positive, like Tisalia.

"Tee hee!" she laughed happily.

At that moment, Glenn had no idea what hid behind her smile.

The date was nearly over. To end the night, they had dinner at the Giant Squid's Inn. The meal mostly consisted of vegetables, but Glenn enjoyed healthy food too, so he ordered according to Tisalia's customs.

By the time they left the inn, it was already late.

"I'll take you to the clinic," said Tisalia.

"N-no, I can't ask you to do that."

"Please, let me. There's something I want to talk to you about."

For some reason, Tisalia's expression was serious. She looked as if she were facing an opponent in the arena.

In the end, Glenn returned to the clinic with Tisalia. The lights were still on. The "closed" sign was up, so Sapphee should've been done with her work, but perhaps she was in her office analyzing the poison.

Tisalia barged into the clinic before Glenn could stop her, throwing open the front door as if it were her own home. She seemed nervous. Glenn had never seen her like this before.

"We're back, Arahnia," she said.

"Huh?"

At Tisalia's announcement, there came a rustling sound, and

Arahnia appeared.

“Yes, yes. Welcome back. You’re right on time, aren’t you? It looks like it went well,” said Arahnia.

“I won’t say it went well, exactly...but it definitely went according to plan.”

“Welcome home, Doctor. I made dinner for you.”

“W-wait a second. Why is Arahnia here?”

Arahnia wore a nurse’s uniform. There was a fairy on her head and another on her shoulder. Glenn couldn’t read the fairies’ expressions, but for some reason, he got the feeling that they were very serious as well.

But why? What had led to this tense atmosphere?

“What’s happened? Sapphee? I’m home!” Glenn called toward the back of the clinic, but his lamia assistant wasn’t there. Had she gone out and asked Arahnia to watch the clinic for her?

It didn’t make sense.

He felt sick, as if his insides were twisted into knots.

“Ummm...what’s going on?”

Arahnia and Tisalia looked at each other, but it was Arahnia who spoke first.

“She left this for you.”

“A-a letter?”

“If you read this, I think you’ll understand what happened. I need to tell you, Doc, it might seem weird coming from me, but I don’t think it’s anyone’s fault. I don’t want you to blame anybody. You gotta promise me before you read the letter. Can you do that?”

That’s when Glenn noticed the silk wrapped around his pinky. Arahnia was forcing him to promise. If he didn’t, she wouldn’t let him read it.

“O-okay, I understand.” Glenn nodded, preparing himself.

“That’s a good boy. Here you go.”

The letter she handed him was thick. As soon as he saw it, he recognized Sapphee’s neat handwriting.

He wondered when she found time to write it.

Dear Dr. Glenn,

If you’re reading this letter, it means I’m no longer at the clinic.

Please forgive me for disappearing in a manner that must seem sudden to you. Also, please forgive me for lying.

Where do I begin? I'm not sure how to write this. Well, it all started with the poison that was released into the canals.

It's traditionally used by the Neikes family.

I knew it the moment I saw it. Actually, I'm sure that the poison was prepared in such a way that only I would know exactly who spread it. There's no mistaking that a member of the Neikes clan created it. The poison is unique to lamia, and it's removed after being concentrated in the body of an assassin resistant to its effects. Assassins have engaged in diabolical experiments for hundreds of years to perfect this method.

You asked me to find out which species made this poison, but I knew from the beginning. I never needed to research it. It was commonly used by my family.

It's only a matter of time before Cthulhy comes to the same conclusion.

Of course, I haven't assassinated anyone. I have no reason to spread poison through the canals, and as a pharmacologist, I don't intend on harming man or monster.

However, once everyone finds out that it's a Neikes poison, the situation will become dangerous for both me and you, Dr. Glenn.

Lindworm's citizens won't believe that I had nothing to do with the poison. The victims will be upset, and Skadi and Cthulhy will suspect a connection with my parents. Even if they don't, they'll try to find a way to use me to get to the perpetrator.

I don't want to make trouble for you. I'm sorry.

I must go to the Neikes village. I don't plan on ever coming back to the clinic or Lindworm.

"What the hell?"

Glenn's hand shook as he gripped the letter. His eyes ran over the writing, rushing to the end.

I've also hurt Tisalia. I asked for her help the day you brought the poison to me. I can't stay in the clinic any longer, but I thought it would be impossible to sneak out if you were home. So, I asked Tisalia to get you out of the clinic for an entire day. I thought it would be hard for you to refuse her broken heart.

I'm sorry that I've become such a wretched woman. I feel like I'm just

apologizing, and this letter is going nowhere. What I mean to say is that I'm not coming back. I intend to get to the bottom of what's going on with the poison in the canals.

I've left everything else up to Tisalia and Arahnia. I hope you'll cooperate with them.

Glenn looked up at Tisalia. "You lied? You lied to get me out of the clinic?"

"No, I didn't." Tisalia wore a stern expression. "It's true, I tricked you. But asking you to go on a date, just for today, was genuinely what I wanted."

"Just a second. You professed your love to me, knowing that I would reject you, so you could get me out of the house? To create an excuse?"

This was unbelievable. How much would you have to prepare yourself to profess your love to someone, Glenn wondered, knowing that it could never be?

"Well... I guess that's true. It's a lie, but it's also true. Sapphee is just as important to me as you are, Doctor. She's my friend, and she may be my rival in love, but I wanted to protect her in any way I could. That's why I helped."

"I know that..." said Glenn. "I know that, but still—"

"I wanted to help her do what she had to do."

Was this what Lorna was talking about when she'd said she hoped Glenn would cater to Tisalia's feelings? Was it what Arahnia meant when she said not to blame anyone?

He didn't intend to blame anyone. Tisalia just did what Sapphee had asked, and Sapphee had had no choice.

But...but...

Glenn's mind spun with a million questions.

He continued reading the letter, hoping they would be answered.

I'm also sorry that I caused you trouble with the marriage discussions. I loved you as a doctor, and as you, Glenn. I truly loved you. But that's all the more reason why I can't stay in the clinic.

I really dreamed of marrying you, but I don't see how that's possible now. I was sure that you felt the same way about me, but now I have no way to confirm that.

I've included some marriage documents. Please choose a bride who

will do right by you. I'd be fine with you marrying Tisalia or Arahnia. They're both dear friends to me, and I think they're good monsters for you to wed.

I'm sorry for being so selfish.

Glenn looked closer. There were marriage documents with the letter—multiple copies of the same document, one with Arahnia and another with Tisalia written in as the bride.

“Why...” Glenn began aloud.

But he knew why. All the reasons were right there in the letter.

The very first time I met you at your family's home, when I met you again at the Academy, and when you decided to open a clinic in Lindworm—all these are memories I treasure. I support your dreams. I always thought I'd be there by your side. But, before I knew it, you'd already surpassed me. The harpy village, Skadi's surgery, and the Barometz crisis are all examples of you coming into your role as an amazing doctor.

That's why I know you'll be just fine without me.

“I'm not fine!” Glenn cried as his hand, holding the letter, formed a fist.

You're someone who follows his dreams and tackles any problem head-on, on your own.

“That's not true... It's not true at all, Sapphee.”

The writing ran as Glenn's tears spilled onto the paper. He wondered whether Sapphee had cried as she wrote the letter. She didn't have tear ducts, but she might have been crying in her heart.

Yet her writing never wavered.

Goodbye, Doctor. Please take care of yourself. Don't cry for me.

It would have been impossible for Glenn not to cry. He clutched the letter in his fist and sobbed.

At some point, he found himself on his knees. He didn't know what to do. No one was at fault. Sapphee was concerned for Glenn, so she left the clinic. She'd conspired with Tisalia and Arahnia, who were concerned about their best friend, and they'd put on an act so that

Sapphee could run away without Glenn finding out.

That was all. But that wasn't all. The one monster who Glenn loved with all his heart was no longer by his side.

"Doctor?" Tisalia hugged Glenn. "It's okay to cry. Go ahead. You should let it all out. You can think about what to do next later."

Glenn couldn't do anything but bawl like a child. Arahnia embraced him from behind with her four arms, as if hiding him from other people's sight while he sobbed.

It would've been impossible not to cry.

Still, Glenn didn't want to be seen crying, so he hid the tears streaming down his face in Tisalia's bosom.

Case 03: The Poisonous Lamia

No matter what happened, Glenn couldn't shut down the clinic...however bad things got, even if Sapphee was no longer by his side.

Despite how sad he was, Lindworm's residents would get sick or injured. Patients would come to the clinic to be examined regardless of Glenn's personal issues.

"I saw the City Council bulletin, Doctor," said an older dryad woman, a regular patient of Glenn's. Dryads were plant monsters known for their strong trunks. As they got older, their branches and leaves grew everywhere. It wasn't a problem when they were young, but as trees aged, they became more vulnerable to worms and moss. To prevent those, dryads required regular pruning. It was the equivalent of a human getting a haircut. Glenn used hedge trimmers to prune them.

"It must have been terrible in the canals," she added.

The mere mention of the incident startled Glenn. "Oh, er...it was fine. The poison wasn't strong, and the affected patients have all gotten better. We were lucky that Skadi responded quickly."

"Oh, the Draconess is always so on top of things. But you worked hard, too, didn't you?"

"No, I just did my job, as always."

Glenn had told Cthulhy and Skadi everything about Sapphee, her family home, and the poison that a Neikes relative had seemingly created, not leaving out any details. He figured they would discover the truth eventually, even if he didn't volunteer the information.

If I'm going to have to talk about this, it's better to do it sooner. It'll help the Council respond, too, and that's the best way to protect the health of Lindworm's citizens.

Glenn prioritized his responsibilities as a doctor; he believed it was what Sapphee would want.

"Anyway, who was it that spread the poison?" asked the dryad. "It sounds like the work of someone who really hates Lindworm."

"I have no idea." That wasn't true, though.

Since Glenn had communicated Sapphee's disappearance to the Draconess so quickly, Skadi was able to control the information that

got out. The latest public bulletin issued by the Lindworm City Council read:

While there is a strong possibility that a group with expertise in assassination and destruction is behind the poisoned canals, this has not been confirmed or proven. The Central Hospital and the clinic are doing everything in their power to mitigate the poison's effects. Effective immediately, Skadi will lead the patrol team in pursuit of the culprits.

"They say the Draconess's guard, Kunai, will be patrolling the town," said the dryad, "and we should call out if anything happens. Poison is frightening, but Kunai looks as though she would be unaffected, so maybe it'll be all right."

"Yes, that's true." In addition to Kunai, warriors from the arena were also patrolling. Everyone was on alert to report it if they saw anyone suspicious.

But Glenn knew the truth.

It wasn't likely that the Neikes assassin would be back. Their objective remained unclear, but they'd successfully brought poison into Lindworm undetected, and spread that poison throughout the city without any fatalities. They had an extraordinary amount of stealth and skill. Glenn didn't think anyone would be able to trace them.

"Is it true that the culprit is an aristocrat from the east? That they hired assassins?"

"I've heard that rumor as well. I don't really have any idea." Glenn remained vague in his responses.

It wasn't public knowledge that the poison came from Sapphee's family home. But another rumor *had* run rampant—that the suspect was from the eastern human realm. This rumor wasn't published in the City Council bulletin, but in a private newspaper—one that had a reputation for printing articles based on gossip. The article claimed that the true perpetrator was an aristocrat from the east with a strong hatred of Lindworm. The newspaper even speculated that this aristocrat could be the powerful Souen, who'd recently taken down his superior during talks with Skadi.

Glenn thought that this particular rumor might have started from Lorna witnessing a suspicious person, but he hadn't expected his brother to be named as it progressed.

"I've heard that Souen is pretty despicable," said the dryad.

"Yes..."

Glenn and Souen shared a surname, but no one in Lindworm knew that they were related. The name “Litbeit” was common in the human realm. They were also worlds apart. Glenn was a town doctor, and Souen was a powerful man in the east. No one would think to link them based on their last name. Their relationship would be evident if anyone investigated their sister Sioux, who’d recently moved to Lindworm. However, no one had done that yet.

“Don’t worry,” Glenn said. “I’m sure Skadi will take care of it.”

“Oh, yes. The Draconess will keep us safe.” Even in casual conversation, the respect Lindworm’s residents held for Skadi was always apparent.

“Okay, you’re all done. I hope that feels better.” Glenn put down the hedge trimmers and picked up the branches he’d pruned.

The dryad stretched slowly. Dryads were nimble when young, but as they aged, their limbs got stiff and their movements became sluggish. It was said that they laid down roots and eventually stopped moving or talking, changing into something almost the same as a tree. Searching for a place to lay down roots was something dryads looked forward to in their old age. They were a strange species.

“Mmm. It feels great. It’s so much better when you do it.”

“Thank you very much.”

“You’re doing a great job, even though your pharmacologist left. That’s quite an accomplishment.”

Glenn could only nod in response. There were very few people who truly knew what was in his heart.

He saw the dryad to the door and prepared for his next patient.

I’m not doing a great job at all.

Glenn couldn’t stop thinking about how the poison connected to Sapphee’s family, and how the rumor in the streets was that Souen Litbeit, his own brother, might be behind it. None of that boded well for the clinic.

He wished the truth would come to light soon. However, if that happened, Sapphee would never be able to regain her honor. He thought it might help if everyone understood that Sapphee had no relationship with the Neikes clan, but he didn’t know how to make that happen.

Despite what she’d written in the letter, Glenn wondered whether Sapphee would ever come back. He quickly pushed such wishful thinking from his mind.

Thankfully, he still had help running the clinic. First of all, there were the fairies. Although they seemed unhappy that Sapphee was gone, they helped Glenn out, and they were far better at running errands than he was. Arahnia also came by often. Besides having experience assisting with surgery, she did household chores for him. Glenn was grateful for this, as he tended to prioritize patients and neglect his own life.

Tisalia didn't come over to help, but she did send Kay and Lorna at times. They weren't able to assist with medical treatment, but they could do chores, or help in the clinic by lending the patients a friendly ear.

Glenn sighed loudly. He'd gotten through another day of examinations somehow, with the help of those around him. Sapphee wrote in her letter that Glenn was doing a great job on his own, but that wasn't the case at all. It would've been impossible on his own. If it weren't for all the help he received, he would have shuttered the clinic long ago.

Sapphee...

Glenn knew now, more than ever, what a vital presence she was to him.

"Sapphee... I can't do it. I can never do this by myself."

He didn't voice these complaints to anyone. He bottled up all his weakness and directed it at the walls of his room when no one else was around. Arahnia had come to help him that afternoon, but she'd already gone home. She put aside her design work to give him more of her time.

"Marriage..."

The marriage certificates—one with Tisalia's name and one with Arahnia's—were still in Glenn's office. He just needed to add his own name and submit the documents to the City Council, and he could marry either woman. Still, there was only one person he could imagine spending the rest of his life with, and that one person was no longer by Glenn's side.

Should he remain single and run the clinic on his own? Or should he choose one of the women who clearly loved him, and have them help with the clinic?

"Ahh...dammit. My mind is just spinning in circles."

There was too much going on.

The situation around him was changing dramatically, but not a single thing was going his way. Glenn could only scratch his head and

wonder why. He was even losing the motivation to do his work, which now included preparing medications and completing paperwork that Sapphee used to take care of.

For now, Glenn decided, he'd do the minimum amount of paperwork he could get away with and go to bed early. He went to the clinic's entrance to hang the "closed" sign.

He suddenly had the urge to drown his worries in alcohol, even though he normally didn't drink at all. He suppressed it, telling himself that such thoughts were pathetic.

"Brother! Brother!"

Glenn looked up and saw someone running down the street. It was a young girl in a patrol uniform—the demon girl, Sioux. His sister. Worried about Glenn becoming depressed with Sapphee gone, Sioux came to the clinic to check on him from time to time. She couldn't help out the way Arahnia did, so she brought simple meals and tried to cheer Glenn up by talking with him.

"Brother! It's terrible!" His sister tended to make a big fuss about things. Glenn sighed, turning to look at Sioux as she ran toward him.

"What is it, Sioux?" *What could be more terrible than Sapphee leaving?*

"It's... We cannot speak outdoors! Umm...inside?"

"Sioux?"

She entered the clinic before Glenn even had time to ask what was going on. He followed behind her, and she quickly closed and locked the door.

"What is it?"

"Shh! Brother! Did you see the town newspaper?"

"No, I didn't, but..."

"Read it quickly, please. Here!"

"What is it?"

When Glenn opened the paper, the first thing he noticed was how far printing technology had come. The quality of the type had improved, and the paper was written clearly in the continent's common tongue. Then he saw it.

Souen Litbeit, a powerful authority in the human realm's council of statesmen, will visit the dragon city. He has departed the human realm and is on his way to Lindworm for an exclusive interview with this publication.

Sources say that humans were involved in spreading poison through the canals. There are rumors that Souen was behind the incident, but Skadi, representative of the City Council, only had this to say: "I'm not concerned."

This newspaper will continue to cover the story as it unfolds.

"What the hell is this?"

"Isn't it horrible?!"

The private papers were being irresponsible as usual. They made it sound like Souen was an evil mastermind.

"Brother Souen's being treated like a criminal! It's terrible!"

"Settle down. Wait, is our brother really coming to Lindworm?"

"He didn't say anything about that in his letter!" Sioux was panicking. "Brother, what should I do?"

She always called their oldest brother by name, and only called Glenn "Brother." She probably felt more comfortable with Glenn, who was closer to her in age.

"He wouldn't come all the way to Lindworm just to check on you," she continued. "No, Brother Souen would never do something like that. He would summon me to him before spending money on travel!"

Harsh as that sounded, Sioux was right. Souen knew that money and power made the world go round, but what made him truly cunning was his ability to go about his business without ruffling anyone's feathers. He knew that when people developed grudges, no amount of logic would change their minds.

"This city's residents would never even have heard the name 'Souen' as an official of the council of statesmen! Why is he all over the news?!"

"How should I know?!" Glenn threw the city newspaper down.

This was all too complicated. He didn't know what to think. Hadn't the poison been spread by a lamia assassin? Or possibly a group of them? If Souen *had* hired them, then why?

"I have no idea what's going on, either!" Glenn cried. "Now Sapphee's gone, and everyone's just tossing around whatever rumors they want! What am I supposed to do?!"

"Brother..."

Glenn had raised his voice in frustration, but nothing would be solved by shouting at Sioux. "I'm sorry. Please, forget it."

“Brother, about Sister Sapphee... She...”

“It’s fine. I don’t know what Souen’s thinking, but I’m sure he would only come here on business. Hopefully, Skadi will take care of it.” Glenn had heard that Skadi and Souen had spoken in the east.

Still, if the people’s suspicions spread to the clinic or Sioux, it would be bad. Glenn needed to pretend that he and Sioux were unrelated to their older brother. Souen could put out his own fires.

“I’m sorry. I must be tired. I’m going to get some rest.”

“Brother, I’m sure Sister will come back. Please trust her.”

“Yes.” Glenn knew that Sioux said this to try and cheer him up. But Sapphee had made it clear that she wasn’t coming back, and he knew very well that she didn’t change her mind easily. He wished he could’ve at least spoken to her once before they’d gone separate ways.

Glenn didn’t have words for Sapphee anymore, however.

“Hrm...”

There was a loud, metallic sound. When Glenn looked up, the door Sioux had locked was ajar. Through the gap, he saw a woman with blue hair.

It was Skadi Dragenfelt.

“Are you busy?” she asked.

“Draconess?!” Sioux cried out.

Skadi’s appearance was that of a young girl, but in her hand, she held the lock that Sioux secured moments earlier. From the metallic sound, it was clear that Skadi had broken it.

“I was in a hurry. Heh.”

“It’s not funny,” said Glenn. “Just use the door like a normal person!”

Skadi stuck out her tongue, but her expression didn’t change. “What happened?”



"I should be the one asking you that. No one told me that Souen was coming."

"Well...we didn't know, either."

Glenn sighed.

"I certainly didn't think he'd come all the way out here while a rumor about him committing crimes is going around," she added.

"It's pretty bad, isn't it?"

"It's actually quite convenient." Skadi was nonchalant.

"Convenient? What do you mean?"

"Well, he chose this time to visit Lindworm, despite the fact that he's never once come to sightsee or even to visit his dear siblings. Next, he'll take the blame... No, he *must* take the blame. It's perfect timing."

"Isn't that a bit harsh?"

"You don't want your brother to be villainized?"

Glenn thought about it. A number of things crossed his mind. For example, when he entered the Monster Academy, Souen had schemed to damage the relationship between Glenn and his parents. He considered Glenn his rival and a nuisance.

"No, I don't really mind."

"What about you, Sioux?"

"Long ago, he blamed me for breaking a vase! I insisted that I didn't do it, but... I hate Brother Souen!"

"Okay, then."

Skadi had decided to make Souen the villain so easily. Thinking back on all the problems his brother had caused him, Glenn reasoned that a false accusation now wasn't such a big deal.

"Well, I'm sure Souen already anticipated all this, although he always ignores our struggles!" Sioux added.

"That's true," Glenn said.

"I see," said Skadi. "Well, if his family agrees, then let's proceed."

"U-understood."

Despite everything, Glenn was glad of the chance to talk to his brother. Even though he wouldn't give it up easily, Souen was bound to know something about what was going on in Lindworm. There was no way he would've chosen to visit now if not.

“Dr. Glenn?”

“Yes?”

“I know you’re sad that Sapphee’s gone, but you can’t take it out on your sister, okay?”

“M-my behavior was shameful,” Glenn said. Skadi was right. He’d made Sioux feel bad.

“I am fine!” said Sioux.

“I understand what it feels like to lose someone close to you. I have lived for a long time.”

“Draconess, what do you do to get over it?” Sioux asked.

“Well, at the moment, I boss Kunai around.”

“Isn’t that taking it out on *her*?”

Glenn thought as he listened to his sister and the Draconess converse. He’d exchanged letters with his brother not too long ago, but hadn’t actually seen him in a very long time. He wished he had time to really sit down and talk to Souen, but the situation wouldn’t allow for it.

“Skadi, please take care of our brother,” he said.

“I think I’ll need your help getting him to talk. Souen will be here the day after tomorrow. Be ready.”

“Huh? The day after tomorrow?” That was sooner than Glenn expected.

Skadi had probably discovered the date with the aid of the City Council’s information network. The newspaper made it sound as if nothing was being done, but Skadi was a politician with foresight.

“I told you, Dr. Glenn. Someday.”

“Hmm?”

“You told me to live. You asked me to try living.”

“Oh, yes.” Glenn remembered. He’d used those words to persuade Skadi when she was ready to succumb to her illness.

“Did you truly understand what you were saying to me? I was tired of living. Then you cracked the whip and inspired me. It was all because of you, Dr. Glenn.”

Glenn was silent.

“You can’t say that to me, then not follow through when it comes to yourself. You asked me whether I’d like to live a long time, and you used your medical skills to ensure that would happen. Now

you're going to give in to despair in your short, human life, just because you lost Sapphee?"

Glenn didn't know what to say. He couldn't even imagine what Skadi's future held. There would surely be tragedy, stress, and boredom in the long years that awaited her. After saving her, though, shouldn't he face life head-on the same way he'd told her to?

"No matter what, you need to live and keep looking forward. Isn't that the responsibility of the Dr. Glenn who cured me?"

"You're right."

"If you do that, then you can make sure that even your short life is fulfilling, right, Big Brother?"

With those parting words, Skadi giggled and left through the door with the broken lock. Having the Draconess, who was much older than him, speak to him like that always made Glenn feel as if his insides were twisted into knots.

"B-Big Brother?" Sioux cried. "Brother Glenn, when did the Draconess become your little sister?!"

"N-no, it's not like that."

"Ohhhh, I hate that! I am your only little sister!"

Sioux was shouting, but the Draconess was already gone. As usual, Skadi had just dropped in to stir up a quick disturbance. The City Council representative came and went like a storm.

But she was right.

"Sioux, we get to see our brother again. I don't get along with him, but..."

"Ugh... I do not like him, either."

The Litbeit siblings' faces were glum.

"It's been a long time, Glenn. Such hospitality. How are the famous dragon dumplings?"

This was Souen's opening. Glenn's older brother had come all the way from the east with his arrogant attitude intact.

"Shouldn't you be thanking me?" Souen added. "Oh, and if you have a letter for our parents, send it yourself. Don't expect me to take it. I just want good food and some local sake."

"You're..." Glenn had no words. He knew that anything he said

would just be wasted on this man.

Souen Litbeit was dressed in traditional eastern clothing with light blue thread for decoration. Its color indicated that he was a high-ranking official. Glenn wondered whether he'd been promoted again. Souen's face—framed by his long hair, worn in a fashionable style—resembled Glenn's, but it was also completely different. It wasn't so much their features that differed, but their expressions. Souen's was full of confidence and fearlessness. If you removed Glenn's humility and replaced it with money and power, then you might have had Souen.

"Well, this drawing room is small, huh? Why did you pick this place?" Souen asked.

"Because of the rumors about you!"

It had been a lot of work to get Souen to come this far. Both humans and monsters all over Lindworm suspected him of being the mastermind behind the poisoning incident. They hadn't gone as far as throwing stones at him, but there was still an uproar when he arrived, and a reporter from the town newspaper followed him around, trying to speak to him. All the inns and shops shut their doors at the sight of him. Glenn had heard that Souen had trouble finding a place to sleep. Supposedly, he was staying at an inn used by City Council members.

"This is the only room where we can avoid being seen. Neither Sioux nor I want to be observed meeting with you."

"Oh, I see. You have your clinic, and Sioux is on the patrol team, right? You probably can't afford to damage your reputations." Souen chuckled.

If he knew that, then he shouldn't have bothered asking. His attitude was exactly the same as when he and Glenn were children. It annoyed Glenn to no end.

"Sorry the room's so small," someone said. Two petite figures entered—Skadi and Sioux. Souen stood up, somewhat flustered. His expression was slightly stunned, a rare sight on him.

"Th-this... Miss Draconess, er... I thought this room was nice and quaint."

"I won't reject your flattery, but you should practice a little more," replied Skadi. "It's just uncomfortable when you're that blatant."

"Ah. You're right."

Glenn frowned. Souen had spoken sternly to his younger brother, but he was completely humble when Skadi was around. That

quick change in attitude might be necessary to politicians and merchants, but it was infuriating to see a family member act this way.

“I was the one who set up this meeting,” Skadi continued. “Souen, you’ve become quite popular in Lindworm. Well, in a bad way, of course. The citizens think you hate monsters and poisoned the canals.”

“Yes. I am aware. In any case...” Souen flipped back his long hair. “I was the one who spread that rumor.”

“Whaaaaaaat?!” Glenn and Sioux both cried.

Skadi also seemed surprised, opening her eyes uncharacteristically wide.

“Wh-why would you do that?” Glenn asked.



“Why? Don’t ask such silly questions, Glenn. The poison introduced into the canals...it was from the Neikes family, right? Once that fact becomes known, Sapphee’s reputation will suffer. Even your clinic will come under suspicion. I protected you by spreading a rumor with no proof or basis whatsoever.”

“That’s a lie! You’d never protect us by doing something that didn’t benefit you!” Glenn was surprised at the certainty in his reply. Sioux, sitting next to him, nodded in agreement.

“Is that any way to speak to your brother? I mean, it’s not as if I thought this would turn out well. You can see how easily rumors fool both monsters and humans.”

“Souen...I won’t overlook this.”

“Oh, is that so? Well, that’s enough for me. I’ll be going now. Sapphee’s not here, but I’m sure she’ll come back very soon.”

So, Souen knew about that, too. “Hrm...”

Souen must have used his political power to gather information around Lindworm. Then he came to visit in order to achieve his objective, whatever that was. He’d probably hired the suspicious man that Lorna saw in the canals.

“I don’t really know,” Skadi replied grumpily. It was unusual for her to show such discomfort. Perhaps she didn’t like people who put up smokescreens to confuse, like Souen. Glenn felt the same way. “Please explain your actions and objectives in a manner that’s easy for even dragons to understand.”

“Ahh, very well. I’ll tell you, despite your presumptuous behavior. First of all, directly after the poison spread through the canals, I received a letter from the Neikes family at my home in the east. Apparently, the Neikes assassins received an order to assassinate Souen Litbeit.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I don’t know all the details, but the Litbeits and the Neikeses once established an alliance to end a war. Thanks to that relationship, they inform me whenever they receive a particularly strange request.”

As part of that alliance, there had also been an exchange of hostages. Sapphee, daughter of the Neikes family’s head, was sent to live in the east with Glenn’s family.

“By the time I received this information, the poison had already been spread throughout the canals. While trying to confirm that the order really was for my death, I learned that there was some sort of...

internal dispute among the assassins. They planned to blame me for the poison attack.”

“Huh?”

“So, I took the initiative and spread the rumor that I was the one behind the poisoning. I thought it might help me find the real culprit. Anyway, now Lindworm’s attention is focused on me.”

“I see...” said Skadi. “It seems you’ve been quite successful, Souen.”

“Danger is an opportunity to be seized.”

Someone had instructed the Neikes assassins to spread the poison. That person had fraudulently used Souen’s name, but they must have been unaware of the Litbeit and Neikes families’ alliance.

“I heard that there were no deaths associated with the poison,” continued Souen. “The situation was kept from being fatal on purpose, yes?”

“That’s the conclusion we came to.”

“Whoever caused this must be punished appropriately. I came here to catch the true culprit and clear my name,” Souen explained.

Perhaps because Souen’s plot was so complicated, Sioux—sitting next to Glenn—had a sour look on her face. She groaned, and a trickle of steam curled upward from her horn tips. Apparently, she developed fevers not only from exercise, but also from difficult conversations.

“That is all I have to say. I had my own motivations,” Souen stated.

“And if I suggest you were simply protecting your siblings?”

“Ha ha ha! I’m not that kind of person.”

Even if some small part of Souen had that intention, he would never admit to it, even under torture. That was just the sort of individual he was.

“It’s just as you heard, Glenn.”

“What is?”

“I acted of my own accord. My next step will be to find the true poisoner. Maybe you should try thinking for yourself sometimes.”

“What are you trying to say?” Glenn fumed. Why couldn’t his brother just speak frankly?

“Hey, don’t start feigning ignorance now.”

“Feigning ignorance?”

“You want to go look for Sapphee, right?” His brother could read him like a book.

“I, umm...” Glenn tried to deny it.

“You should go follow Sapphee. It wouldn’t be hard to find out where she is. Why don’t you go?”

“I’m in charge of the clinic. I can’t just abandon it.”

“So, you’re going to wait for her to come back eventually?”

Glenn was silent. Souen must’ve been gathering information about Lindworm for a long time. With his clout, he no doubt had plenty of people who could do his bidding.

Including Sapphee.

Including Glenn.

Souen knew something. “Brother, what are you trying to say?” Glenn asked.

“I’m just thinking of you, dear brother. What’s wrong with following the woman you love?”

“Sapphee said she wouldn’t come back. That’s why...that’s why I have to give up.”

She’d said she had no intention of returning. She must have gone back to her family home to speak with the Neikeses’ leader. What would that accomplish, however? It wouldn’t change the fact that the Neikes clan spread the poison, and it wouldn’t save her from sharing the blame.

“And you’re really okay with that?” Souen narrowed his eyes. “You’re free to make your own decisions, of course...but, as a Litbeit, I wish you’d have a bit more pride in your choices.”

“Brother?” Glenn was confused.

“Souen...” Skadi opened her mouth. “Am I in your way here?”

“What are you talking about?”

“You’re hiding something.” Skadi looked at Souen with her childlike eyes.

Souen grew silent. There was sweat on his brow. Glenn had never seen this man, this...cold-blooded animal, lose his cool.

“I’m sorry for making so many demands, but may I speak to my family alone?” he asked.

“Yes, of course,” Skadi replied. “Is that going to make things better?”

"I've already discovered the whereabouts of the person who poisoned the canals. One of my subordinates should be telling the Draconess's guard as we speak." Leaving out important details was a bad habit of Souen's.

"You should've said that at the beginning," Skadi growled. "I thought you were someone who only acted with your own benefit in mind?"

"That's not true. Well, it's not entirely true. Regardless, I'd like to speak with my siblings in private now."

Glenn had no idea what was going on. Why did Souen seem cornered?

"He has a secret he doesn't want to reveal in front of me," Skadi said.

"Draconess!"

"It's probably unrelated to the poisoned-water incident. Perhaps it's something about your heart, Dr. Glenn. Make sure you listen carefully. Now, I'll leave you alone with your family, Souen."

"Thank you very much."

Skadi slipped out of the room, her long tail swaying.

"So, what is it?" Glenn asked.

"Glenn, Sioux, I have something important to tell you." Souen's face was serious as he looked at his siblings. Sioux, who seemed to struggle to follow the conversation, sat up straight.

Souen strode to the window, checking for eavesdroppers.

"I have fallen in love."

Glenn gasped.

Sioux was so surprised that she shouted. "Huuuhhh?!"

"Idiot. Keep your voice down. Make sure this doesn't get out to anyone."

"Love? I thought you had no interest in that sort of thing," said Glenn.

"I've never cared for frivolous talk. But it's the strangest thing... A woman expressed interest in me. Before I knew it, I had feelings for her, too. We've been together about five years now."

The man who only saw people in terms of how they could profit him was now saying he was in love. Moreover, he said it unprompted. For possibly the first time, Glenn saw a human side to his brother.

"B-Brother Souen! I've never heard such a thing!"

"It's not something I can admit easily. Also, this woman has Demonitis."

"Huh?"

"So, we can't live together yet. She lives secretly in a manor on land that I own, with others who also have Demonitis. We only see each other a few times each year. But I want to marry her someday. Sioux, you're no good at keeping secrets. Now that you know, I must ask you not to come back to the human realm for a while."

"I-I do not even want to go back."

Glenn understood. How would Souen be received in the east if he said he wanted to marry a demon? Once Sioux had grown horns, she had trouble simply living in the human realm, which was why she moved to Lindworm.

"If I wish to marry a woman who's become a demon, then I must quell the discrimination in the east. People with Demonitis are deprived of the right to marry. Can you believe it? It's despicable. I must change the law in order to be with the woman I love."

"Is that why you've been working with the council of statesmen, Brother?" Sioux asked.

"That's right. Gaining political control is the fastest way to enact change."

Glenn had thought that Souen always acted according to his own ambitions. Well...he *was* trying to change the law to serve his personal goals. Still, Glenn never imagined that his brother's ambition might stem from love.

"S-Souen, I thought you only cared for power and control."

"I was just playing a part. I can't let anyone, even my family, discover my true intentions."

"Because...you can't marry her?"

"Right. Of course, that's not all. My desire to be with this woman has consumed my desire to succeed." Souen spoke without fear. He was putting everything in his life on the line for the woman he loved.

"Brother... Perhaps you shouldn't have told us."

"I've kept it secret from you until now. I took my boss down, and I rose in the ranks as a result, but there's still a long way to go. So, why do you think I told you?"

Glenn was silent.

"Glenn, if you don't chase the woman you love, you'll never have her."

“Er...”

“I’m fully prepared to change the human realm’s way of life for a woman. What about you? Don’t you want Sapphee?”

“But... Sapphee... I don’t think she wants that.”

“The woman I’m going to marry has said similar things many times. ‘Don’t take risks for me,’ and, ‘You should live how you want to.’ But I *am* living exactly how I want to. How about you, Glenn?”

“Er...”

What *did* Glenn want?

What could he do for Sapphee now?

“Demonitis isn’t an illness. It’s genetic. More and more people in the human realm say we should reconcile with the monsters of the west. Someday, I’ll be able to marry my sweetheart.”

“Brother...”

Their brother was the type who got everything he wanted. But what about Glenn?

“Show some ambition once in a while. Like when you said you were going to become a doctor no matter what, and ran away from home to join the Monster Academy.”

Of course, their parents had opposed that. Souen was happy to kick Glenn out of the house so he wouldn’t have to fight over who would succeed their father later. He’d actively encouraged Glenn to leave.

But what made Glenn want to be a doctor in the first place?

“Ah!” Glenn hit the desk with his hands and stood up. Sioux looked startled. Her shoulders quivered.

“Are you finally ready?” Souen chuckled, as if he was enjoying himself.

“Yes, Brother.”

Glenn had first decided that he wanted to become a doctor when he was young, and Sapphee caught a cold. If he was going to be a full-fledged doctor, then he needed Sapphee by his side.

“I’m going to get Sapphee.”

He didn’t know *how* he was going to do it. There was no guarantee that Sapphee was even somewhere he could reach. Still, if he didn’t at least try, he might lose her forever.

Sioux saw Glenn’s determination and nodded her head vigorously. “Yes, I agree! I believe this is a good idea!”

No matter what Sapphee was thinking now, she'd told Glenn that she loved him. Glenn had to see her at least one more time so he could give her his reply.

"We can finally get down to business." Souen took out a piece of paper. It was covered in writing in the eastern language. "Now, after I received the Neikes family's letter, I did a lot of research. A criminal has escaped from prison in the human realm."

"A-a criminal?"

"That criminal has a grudge against me and the Draconess. He's got both money and power, complicating the issue. He has supporters, and was able to escape by using a body double. One of my contacts discovered that he's now staying in Lindworm. He's the only plausible culprit behind this poisoning incident."

Glenn tilted his head. "Where is he? If he's in Lindworm, then we need to tell Skadi right aw—"

"Think, Glenn. There's only one place in this city where you can go overnight without giving your name or identity. They let anyone stay, from thieves to murderous demons. It's outside the city walls, but I'm sure it's part of Lindworm."

Someplace where anybody could stay, no questions asked? Glenn had never heard such nonsense.

Then he remembered. There was a place that was part of the city, but had a completely different atmosphere. The area had shifted its focus to tourism lately, and more and more outsiders came to visit.

"The graveyard city. Deadlich Hotel." Glenn spat the words.

"Just the other day, I heard that an albino lamia had crossed the monster realm's border and taken the road to Lindworm. They would've arrived in the graveyard city yesterday. They're either preparing something...or waiting for an opportunity."

"Brother!" Glenn exclaimed. "You even know that?"

"The web of information between merchants stretches far. Anything else to say? Have I laid it out enough for you?"

Glenn nodded. He burst out of the small conference room like a gust of wind.

"Ugh. My little brother requires so much care." Souen let out a deep sigh.

Sioux didn't say anything, but she patted her eldest brother on the back.

Saphentite Neikes had been raised as an assassin.

The Neikes family and all affiliated clans put on the public front of being pharmacologists. However, they had a history of using their pharmacies to conceal their assassination business. The current family head, Sapphee's mother, had never put much emphasis on assassination work. She didn't flinch from it either, but in this peaceful era, it was better for the Neikes family to focus on pharmacology. Times of peace made very little work for assassins. However, there would always be a venomous fang available, just in case it was necessary. That was Sapphee's mother's approach.

But would her mother do such a rash thing as spread poison in Lindworm? Sapphee returned to the Neikes village with that question on her mind.

Her mother gave her an icy stare. "Perhaps one of the lower houses took the order. I have no idea."

She looked exactly the same as when she'd taught Sapphee both the art of assassination, and how to prepare pharmaceuticals. She had to be getting up there, age-wise, but showed no outward sign of it.

"Since the assassin didn't kill anyone, the client must've been either reckless or rude," Sapphee's mother added. "Our family would never end a job without completing the client's request...unless, of course, they offended us. We have nothing to gain from making waves in Lindworm."

Her mother only saw Lindworm as a booming emerging city. Sapphee was sure she held no special sentiment for it. To Sapphee, though, Lindworm was where she'd spent her days with Glenn. It mattered to her.

"That's why I can't grant your request, Saphentite. The assassin only did his job as directed by the Neikeses. We neither criticize nor punish perpetrators."

Sapphee didn't say anything. She knew her family would never reveal who'd ordered the canals poisoned. This was the Neikes clan's livelihood. Could she seek out the culprit on her own? If she succeeded in that, she might be the next one assassinated. Sapphee's mother would be diligent in her pursuit if her own daughter turned traitor to the family, perhaps even more so *because* it was her daughter.

Sapphee's only option was to find the client—not the assassin—and kill them.

And so, Sapphee returned to Lindworm's graveyard city.

She laughed at herself in the dark. *This is so silly. The incident's already over. The assassin only did his job, and peace has returned to Lindworm. What's the point of killing the client?*

She clutched her favorite poisonous knife in one hand.

Pulling away from the man she loved tore Sapphee apart. The least she could do was make sure that the poisoner was punished appropriately.

Sapphee had hidden herself in the Deadlich Hotel's ceiling. She peeked into one of the rooms through a crack.

A guest from far away was staying in this room. Sapphee had stolen a glance at the hotel's guestbook and learned that his name was Souen Litbeit. Of course, Sapphee realized it was a false name. This middle-aged man with his chubby physique was a far cry from the slender Souen she knew.

Sapphee prepared herself and slapped her tail on the ceiling. The deteriorating tiles, kept that way to maintain the graveyard atmosphere, broke easily.

She slipped into the room, wriggling her snakelike body as she landed on the floor. By shaping herself into a spring, she softened the impact. The fat man screamed at the sight of her.

"Souen Litbeit—no, you've borrowed that name, haven't you, former Duke Auchraw?"

"Er."

The man cowered before her. His legs had become completely useless. Even if Sapphee wasn't trained in the art of assassination, it wouldn't have been difficult to stop him.

Deadlich Hotel was, well, dead and deserted. This was intentional. The building's spooky atmosphere attracted tourists—and, of course, criminals using false identities. The hotel allowed anyone to stay under any name, be they criminal or not, as long as other guests weren't harmed. This was a nuisance for those living in the city, but as far as Sapphee could tell, it had been the way of things since the previous manager.

Besides, almost all the graveyard city's residents were dead. Getting into downtown Lindworm from here required passing through the customs gate. That was probably why they thought keeping a guestbook was sufficient.

In her head, Sapphee chided Molly for being so lax about her duties.

“I know everything,” she told Auchraw. “You were a statesman in the east, but Skadi ousted you for selling harpy eggs. You were arrested, but you had a guide, didn’t you? You held a grudge against Souen and Skadi—no, all of Lindworm—and made an order for the city to be poisoned.”

Auchraw wailed. He’d never had any dignity, even when he was a statesman.

“If you behave, I won’t take your life.” Sapphee couldn’t believe the words coming out of her mouth. “What am I saying? I probably will take your life.”

Auchraw ran around the hotel, trying to escape. Sapphee took her time following him.

There was no need to hurry. Sapphee’s eyes sensed heat, so she could tell where the man was, even through the walls. Pretty much everyone else in the graveyard city was already dead.

“Hmm?” Sapphee tilted her head.

The single heat source she’d been tracking was blurred. It seemed almost as if two heat sources had overlapped. Someone else had come to this floor of the hotel.

“It couldn’t be.”

Sapphee stopped in her tracks. She didn’t know whether she should keep following Auchraw or run away. But before she could decide...

“Hey.” The voice was exactly as Sapphee remembered it. “We made it, thanks to Molly.”

The heat source she saw through the wall revealed himself.

His temperature was high—he must’ve run. He was breathing heavily, too. Sapphee’s ears hadn’t betrayed her, however. It was, indeed, the voice of the man Sapphee loved.

“Dr. Glenn.”

The town doctor appeared in front of Sapphee with a smile.

Case 04: Glenn Litbeit's Resolution

“Dr. Glenn! What are you doing here?”

“My brother Souen came to Lindworm. He told me everything, and we figured this was the only place that made sense.”

Glenn wiped the sweat off his brow. He'd met with the graveyard city manager, Molly, and discovered that a suspicious guest was staying in the hotel under Souen's name.

“Molly was surprised, too. She said they couldn't let the canal incident's mastermind stay in the hotel. She told me to check, but I was sure that you'd come to target the former duke.”

“If you were able to respond so quickly, then Souen and Skadi must know, too.”

Glenn laughed. “Of course. This is a Lindworm crisis.”

The former duke was still scrambling to flee the hotel. Skadi, Molly, Sioux, and a whole patrol team were following him. It was only a matter of time before they'd catch him.

“So, the poisoning incident's almost over?” asked Sapphee. “Then the only problem left is me, Dr. Glenn.”

“No. The problem is you and me.”

Glenn wanted to say that he was happy to see Sapphee, especially after thinking he'd never see her again. But first, he had to do something about the poisoned knife in her hand.

“Skadi and the others are chasing the former duke, so you don't need to do this, Sapphee.”

Sapphee bit her lip.

“Put the knife away, and let's go back to the clinic together,” Glenn continued. “No one in Lindworm is blaming you for anything. We'll explain it all, and they'll understand.”

“I can't.” Sapphee's voice was determined.

“Why?”

“I can't. I'm never going back.”

Glenn realized that he might not have thought this all the way through. He'd believed that if he saw Sapphee again, he could change her mind. He'd thought that if he told her his true feelings, she would definitely come back. It had all seemed so easy in his head.

Sapphee's icy expression made Glenn realize that he was wrong.

"Doctor, I was born and raised as an assassin."

"I know that, but—"

"I've never actually taken a life, but I still have an assassin's heart. Since the war ended, I've only wanted to save people with my pharmaceutical knowledge. My family opposed my dream, but I entered the Academy anyway. I thought that if I was with you, Dr. Glenn, my knowledge could be useful. I thought I'd be useful to *you*. I was so wrong."

Sapphee staggered away.

Glenn took a step forward, but she moved farther backward. He stopped. If he pushed her too hard, she would slip through his fingers like water.

"My family did this."

"That's not your fault, Sapphee."

"Of course it's not. But the same blood runs through my veins. This incident could easily have put the clinic out of business. You might've had to give up being a doctor. That's why I left Lindworm. I wanted to cut ties with my family once and for all, and punish the mastermind behind the incident."

Sapphee put the poisoned blade back in her bag. Her face was a mask of regret.

"Because I'm an assassin, my first instinct is to punish criminals myself, in private."

"Sapphee..."

"But I couldn't punish the criminals in my family. I wanted to cut them off completely, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. I thought I could kill the former duke, because he was a stranger, but I can't even assassinate him properly."

"That's because you're not an assassin, Sapphee. You're a pharmacologist, and my assistant."

"If I were a pharmacologist—!" Sapphee screamed. The sound seemed to startle her back into her white-scaled body. She closed her eyes and took a deep, calming breath. "If I were a pharmacologist, I never would have left. I should've responded to the situation in the canals as a medical professional, no matter what."

"Sapphee..."

"It shouldn't have mattered where the poison came from. If the canals were poisoned, I should have collected the toxin, investigated

it, and created an antidote. If I really was a pharmacologist, that's what I would have done."

Glenn waited for her to continue, unable to say anything.

"I gave in to my emotions and tried to end the suspect's life with a poisoned blade. I can't make it as an assassin, and I can't make it as a pharmacologist. I don't belong anywhere. That's why I can't go back to the clinic with you, Doctor."

Glenn still didn't know what to say.

Sapphee covered her face. "In the end, I'm an assassin. I gave up any right to call myself a pharmacologist the moment I tried to kill someone."

"What are you talking about?"

Glenn knew just how many times Sapphee had saved him. If it weren't for her, he never would've started the clinic. Even if Sapphee was the descendant of assassins, Glenn knew she rejected that path and chose pharmacology instead.

"Sapphee, you took charge of your life and worked hard to become a successful pharmacologist. You kept your eyes on your goal, never caring about where you came from. You did all that yourself. You *lived* as yourself. Even the Neikes assassin who came here never intended to slaughter Lindworm's residents, right? They made sure the dose of poison was very small. They still shouldn't have poisoned the canals, but...your family doesn't just take lives without thinking about it, even if they're ordered to."

Sapphee had learned to make poison during her training as an assassin. That knowledge and experience was useful when it came to making medicine and treating diseases. Her expertise had saved the city before, when the sleeping disease overtook the residents.

"You're not disqualified from practicing medicine just because you're an assassin. There's no reason that you can't still be a pharmacologist. It's *because* you're trained as an assassin that you make such a good pharmacologist. You know better than anyone how poison can be used to medicate."

Poison and medicine were two sides of the same coin. Chemicals that healed in small doses became poisonous in large doses. Sapphee knew all about such things.

"You're Sapphee, who chose a pharmacologist's life despite being born into a family of assassins. Your dream is still waiting for you in Lindworm!"

"I can't. I've already made a terrible mistake."

“So? You’ve made *one* mistake! No one blames you. You can come back from it!”

“No. For a person who saves lives, a single mistake can be fatal. No one should trust me with their life again.”

Glenn sighed.

Sapphee’s mind seemed made up. She carefully moved her long body toward the rickety window, maintaining her distance from Glenn. It would be easy for her to break through the window and flee.

“About the marriage certificate,” Glenn said.

“Yes?” Sapphee narrowed her eyes at the sudden change in topic. “I have no objections to Tisalia or Arahnia. Please marry whichever one you like.”

“There was a time when I thought, if it was what you wanted, I’d choose one of them. They’re both wonderful women, but...”

Glenn held something out to Sapphee. It was a rolled-up piece of parchment.

“There’s only one person I want to marry.”

The parchment was a marriage certificate with Glenn’s name on it. The place for his wife’s name was blank, but Sapphee must’ve figured out what he was getting at.

“That...”

“I checked with Skadi. You weren’t exiled from the city, so you’re still a Lindworm resident. You can get married.”

Glenn looked straight at Sapphee. Now, he had to say what he hadn’t been able to for so long. If he needed to grow up—to make a decision—now was the time.

Glenn had been separated from Sapphee twice. The first separation was when they were children. The second was when Sapphee left the letter for him. He wouldn’t let it happen a third time.

“I want to marry you, Sapphee.”

“Glenn...” Sapphee’s lip quivered. “I, er...umm...”

She shook her head. Her tail thumped against the floor, as if that was the only way she could convey her internal conflict. She clearly didn’t know what to say.

Glenn watched her unwaveringly, waiting for her answer. “If you can’t be an assassin, and you can’t be a pharmacologist, then just be by my side as my wife.”

Sapphee shifted slightly.

Just when Glenn was about give up hope, she flew into his arms.

“I will,” she said, muffled. “I want to be with you forever, too! I want to be by your side, Glenn! I don’t ever want to be apart again!”

Sapphee hiccupped as she spoke. As a lamia, she didn’t have tear ducts; she couldn’t cry. But her sobs spoke volumes. She was crying without tears.

“Mmm-hmm.” Glenn hugged Sapphee, holding his own tears back.



In the distance, a bell rang.

It was the bell of the graveyard city's abandoned church. Glenn suddenly noticed lanterns lighting the dark hotel hallway. They gave off a soft glow, as if in celebration.

"I wonder if...the ghosts were watching us."

Sapphee had buried her head in Glenn's chest, so she hadn't noticed the graveyard city giving them its blessing yet. Glenn was embarrassed to learn that he'd proposed in front of a crowd, but the ghosts surely didn't mean any harm. It felt kind of nice to be blessed by the demon flames.

The bell kept ringing. It was probably also part of the ghosts' celebration.

Glenn never imagined that he would propose in a graveyard, but now that he had, it felt like the perfect fit.

"I won't let you go again, Glenn." Sapphee's tail coiled tightly around Glenn's ankles, and both her arms wrapped around his torso. There was no way he could escape from her grip. "I hope you understand that."

"Yes." Before, Glenn might have cringed if Sapphee said something like that. But he was ready now. He'd decided to be with this woman for the rest of his life. "Let's do this, Sapphee."

"Er, w-well..." Sapphee wasn't used to hearing Glenn speak with such conviction. Her face was bright red. "Oh, erm, yes. Let's."

She was almost whispering.

A man ran down the mountain path. He wasn't young, and he breathed heavily as he moved, but there was no one following him. Lindworm's patrol team probably hadn't expected that he would head into the Vivre Mountains. They were likely searching downtown by now.

I-I did it! The man laughed to himself. He'd lost a lot of weight, but he still had plenty left over from his many years of indulgence. He was down and out, but he was still a statesman of the human realm.

"Souen...and that lizard girl...they won't get away with this! I'll make sure they pay for what they've done!"

The light of revenge shone in Duke Auchraw's eyes as he thought about Souen and Skadi. Souen was his subordinate, but had

still masterminded the whole scheme. Auchraw wasn't just furious at those two, but at the entire city of Lindworm.

"I still have supporters! I can hide in the west and build an army!"

In the former duke's mind, humans and monsters would eventually be at war again. In the confusion, he would kill Souen and take back his position as statesman. It would've seemed an absurd goal to anyone else. Auchraw had already been convicted of his crimes, so there was no way he could resume his old rank. However, he was too preoccupied with revenge to distinguish reality from fiction anymore.

"You just watch, Souen! I'm coming for you next!"

Ironically, after Auchraw had fallen from his position—indeed, perhaps *because* he had—his influence surged. Those who found the up-and-coming Souen unpleasant wanted to use Auchraw to deal the young Litbeit a blow. Thanks to those supporters, Auchraw had more money than any escaped criminal could've wanted. That funding had allowed him to hide in the eerie graveyard city's hotel.

It was also why he was able to hire the Neikes clan.

"Those Neikeses! I requested a massacre, but they only ran a bit of poison through the canals! And who was that woman who attacked me? Did the assassin come to shut me up? Those snakes will kill anyone!"

Auchraw continued along the mountain path. He was taking a route that avoided the harpy village, so the terrain was rough. He kept going, though, even when his feet got stuck in the mud.

"I'm still... I still...!"

He'd heard that there were monsters in the west who weren't fond of Lindworm. Some even considered the city off-putting. The same was true of Souen. The nails that stuck out were the ones that got hammered down. No, they *had* to be hammered down! They only served as obstacles to those in power. And Auchraw would swing the hammer.

There was something almost admirable in his obsession. It was the only thing left that he could truly call his.

Still, trying to cross the Vivre Mountains without any equipment was extremely reckless. No one was around to point out his recklessness, however.

"Argh!" Auchraw hit something. It looked like a heap of cloth. "Ugh. What the hell is this doing in the middle of the mountain trail?"

The cloth pile was massive. As it rose up in front of the former duke, Auchraw remembered tales from the east about a creature called a “nurikabe.” It was a magical being that got in the way of travelers.

“Whaaat? Ohhh.” The voice was low, and seemed to resound from the depths of the earth, but it came from above Auchraw’s head. The former duke looked up, and what he saw paralyzed him with fright.

“Er?!” he gasped.

“Ohhh, are you lossst? We don’t get many visitors heeere.”

“M-monster!”

What he’d thought was a pile of cloth was a giant as tall as ten people standing on each other’s shoulders. This giant’s name was Dione Nephilim. Unbeknownst to Auchraw, of course, she was the only remaining member of the gigas species.

“Mmmm! Who are you calling a monsterrr? You are ruuude.” Her palm dropped from the heavens.

“Eeek!” Auchraw ran from the hand, which could easily have crushed him. From Dione’s perspective, she was just slapping the ground in protest at being called a monster, but to Auchraw, it was an attack.

“We’ve caught up with you!”

Auchraw knew that voice. He froze.

“I couldn’t believe it. You hid in the hotel. Molly, if you would just take down your guests’ information, we could have figured this out much sooner.”

“Disagree, Kunai. This is how the hotel has been run since the previous manager. It is impossible for guests who do not possess verifiable proof of identity to provide such information.”

“You’re a stubborn woman.”

Two figures climbed the mountain path. One was the Draconess’s patchwork guard, and the other was the hotel manager. The girl with Demonitis was with them, and she was armed.

“Y-you’re Souen’s younger sister! How did you get here?!”

“It has been a long time, Duke Auchraw—no, *former* duke,” replied Sioux. “I now work in the Lindworm patrol. We chased you down, Mr. Auchraw. Soon, the main patrol team will be here as well.”

How had they found him? There had been no sign of anyone following. And if they’d known his whereabouts, why hadn’t they

apprehended him sooner?

“Former Duke, I am indebted to you, despite the criminal circumstances in which we find you. You treated me well when I served as your marshal, and I shall not forget it. If you come quietly, we will treat you well. Let us be civil.”

“Sh-shut up! You dirty demon! You dare defy me after all I did for you? You’re just as ungrateful as your brother!” Auchraw was shouting now.

Sioux only responded by narrowing her eyes slightly. Auchraw realized that it was an expression of pity, which made him even angrier.

“Don’t you look at me like that! ‘Indebted,’ you say?! I don’t remember selling favors to a demon, you idiot!” He continued to hurl abuse, his voice dripping with violence. “Lindworm is full of... aberrations like you! You should all be driven out! Watch! When the human and monster realms are at war again, territories like Lindworm will be destroyed and forgotten!”

“You don’t seem remorseful at all.” A dragon with blue scales came up the mountain trail.

“Draconess!”

“Did you really think you would get through the Vivre Mountains without any equipment? If you don’t want to end up dead in a ditch, you should come with us. You’ll serve your time for poisoning the canals, but after that, you’ll be free.”

“Have you all lost your minds? There’s no way I could’ve poisoned the canals. You think I know how to do something like that? It was some assassin’s work.”

“You’re going to play innocent now?” Skadi’s voice dripped with pity.

Even though he was surrounded, Auchraw still thought he might be able to escape. He was a politician, and he had plenty of experience weaseling out of difficult situations.

“The Neikes family has been charged with the crime,” Skadi continued. “Even Lindworm’s patrol team didn’t detect their infiltration. The poison was in place before anyone noticed. Pursuing, arresting, and questioning a group of assassins is quite the difficult task in the monster realm.”

In the past, Auchraw had hired former soldiers for the harpy-egg trade, but the Draconess caught them. The soldiers had even switched sides, and now worked in Lindworm—yet another reason Auchraw so

resented the Draconess. He'd paid extra for lamia assassins so that they wouldn't be caught this time.

"But what about you?"

"What?"

"Can *you* withstand an interrogation? It doesn't look like it."

Skadi glanced at the patchwork girl next to her. Kunai was well-built and garbed in eastern clothing. She cracked her knuckles, looking as if she could easily break Auchraw's arms.

"Plenty of monsters in Lindworm are skilled at interrogation," Skadi said.

"F-fine. A deal! Let's make a deal." Auchraw couldn't stomach the thought of violence.

"A deal?" Skadi's eyebrows knitted in annoyance.

Auchraw didn't notice. "This is in your interest. P-promise me you'll just hear me out."

Skadi waited silently.

"The harpies," Auchraw continued. "There are tons of harpies in Lindworm! I'll introduce you to someone who will pay high prices for their eggs! With my connections, Draconess, harpy eggs might as well be made of gold! You'll be rich! So, let's make a deal. I'll give you my connections, and you can let me g—"

"Are you serious?" Skadi sighed. She'd been foolish to listen to him for even a moment. "You really are incapable of remorse, aren't you?"

That's when Auchraw realized that shining eyes stared out at him from the surrounding trees. Who were they? Why were they watching him?

"I really don't intend to sit here and point out every ridiculously stupid thing you say." Skadi spoke without emotion. "But you certainly need to stop pitching businesses that prey on monsters to monsters. Souen is far better at calculating profits and losses than you are."

Auchraw was about to spit out a comeback when he heard the sound of a bird's flapping wings—no, it wasn't a bird. The flame-colored wings of a harpy were unmistakable, even in the dark of night.

A harpy?

"Draconess! Is this the person you were looking for?"

“Yes, Illy. Thank you. You and your sisters found him right away.”

“He was staggering so much, it was easy! So, then... This guy? Whaaat?” The red-feathered harpy stared at Auchraw.

In the eastern language, “night blindness” was known as “bird eyes,” but many birds could actually fly at night. Illy’s eyes reflected the moonlight with a faint green sheen.

“L-Little girl! Do you know me? I’m Auchraw, the statesman and duke.”

“Who cares?! I don’t care about *statesmen* or *dukes*! You hurt me and my friends terribly! Do you even realize that?!”

“Whaaat?!” Auchraw cried.

The sound of flapping wings echoed across the mountain as several harpies flew into the sky.

“I’m sure that you don’t care about those harpies you were forcing to lay eggs, but I almost died from it. I was lucky the good doctor was there!”

That’s when Auchraw finally realized what he’d done. He had hired men to kidnap these harpy girls and forced them to lay eggs in Lindworm. The eyes of every harpy around him were full of anger.

No wonder Skadi was able to catch up with him so quickly. The harpies were tracking him from the treetops. Auchraw had been a fool to think that no one followed him.

“I’m Illy. Not that I expect you to remember. But you *are* going to think about what you’ve done.”

“Wh-what?”

“First, you captured me and my family and forced us to lay eggs!”

Illy had been rescued, and now lived in the harpy village, delivering mail in Lindworm. She was only just starting to call the others in the village “family.”

“Next, you spread poison in the canals, endangering my friends and their families in Lindworm! That’s unforgivable!” The red-winged harpy spoke to Auchraw as if she were a judge passing sentence.

Auchraw staggered away, so angry that he couldn’t see straight. However, he’d forgotten what blocked his path...and he bumped into the cloth wall. “Argh!”

“Hmmm?” mumbled Dione. “What happened?”

“Eeek!”

Auchraw thought that he was floating into the air. By the time he realized that something had picked him up, it was too late.

The wild giant held Auchraw tight. “It seems you’re not just a loost traveler. What’s going on?”

“He was behind the harpy-egg trade, Dione,” said Illy.

“Oh, is that sooo? Then...perhaps he needs a taaalking to?”

The harpy girl lifted one leg while she hovered in the air. Her claws, which looked as though they could rip a human apart instantly, shone in the moonlight.

“Hey, Draconess, this guy isn’t remorseful at all. Can I just punish him a little?”

“You know that’s not allowed, Illy. There will be no vigilantes here.”

The other harpies chirped their complaints.

“Eh?”

“Are you serious?”

“Unbelievable.”

Auchraw breathed a sigh of relief, yet that relief was short-lived.

“But, well—” Skadi continued her train of thought. “If the suspect was a little beaten up, we could always say that was because he resisted arrest. We wouldn’t have been able to catch him without your help. If something occurs between now and when the patrol team arrives... Well, if I didn’t see it, it didn’t happen.”

“Okay!” The red-winged harpies answered cheerfully.

“Whaaat?” Auchraw was hysterical.

Dione placed the former duke on the ground. The women with Skadi turned away, and the harpies’ claws closed in.

Auchraw’s screams echoed throughout the mountain.

Skadi was sure that Illy and her friends wouldn’t kill him. She figured that this man, who looked down on monsters and thought of harpies as nothing more than objects of trade, needed harsh punishment.

“Kunai...it’s cold.”

“That’s because you’re not wearing your robe, Draconess. Let’s go back to the hotel and rest. The patrol team can take it from here.”

Though she’d complained, Skadi wasn’t shivering. She let out a

small breath of flame. Even in the Vivre Mountains, with winter approaching, a fire dragon could withstand the cold.

Nor did the temperature affect Kunai, who was dead, or Molly, who wasn't limited by living beings' physical constraints.

"Sioux, aren't you chilly? Are you okay?" Skadi asked.

"Well, ever since I became a demon, I have gotten more tolerant of the cold. Please, do not worry."

"I see. Well then, this case is closed." The slave trade that had originated in Lindworm was finally at an end. Skadi stretched out her wings in relief. "It really is cold."

"After we go back to the hotel, we'll make some tea," said Kunai. "Still, it's unclear what's happening in the hotel now. Hopefully, Dr. Glenn was able to talk Sapphee down, but the probability of that, according to my calculations, is—"

Skadi cut her off quickly. "I don't think that'll be a problem."

Each monster and human had a soulmate. It was obvious to everyone that Glenn and Sapphee were connected. They'd been brought together by fate.

"Well, fate or not, I'll swoop in to take it," Skadi said.

"Draconess? What are you talking about?"

Skadi brushed the question aside. "Nothing. I'm just talking to myself."

She didn't want to deal with Kunai, whom she knew still hoped for a shot with Glenn.

"Sioux," Skadi asked, "are you wondering what's going on with your brother?"

"I wonder!" Sioux didn't beat around the bush. "I am extremely curious. Will Sister become my sister-in-law? Or will someone else be involved? What should I report to our family? I wonder many things!"

Skadi laughed. "You'll find out when we get back to the hotel."

Dragons had long lives. They witnessed the deaths of many, and perhaps that was why Skadi kept the dead around her. Kunai and Molly were two of her closest companions. She felt some envy for Sioux, who did everything she could to live her best life.

Skadi never took her longevity for granted. She lived each day to the fullest. After all, her life would be significantly lengthened thanks to Cthulhy and Glenn.

"Molly, can you get me some warm tea at the hotel?"

“Yes. The previous manager left a recipe. It contains herbs.”

“The graveyard city’s herbs...they aren’t rotten, are they?”

“Their expiration date might have passed, but my judgment is that a dragon’s body could digest them without a problem.”

“Still, I’d like something fresher.”

The main patrol team came up the mountain path, and Skadi motioned that she was leaving the rest to them. The team moved into position to apprehend Auchraw.

“Oh, I’m going to borrow Sioux for a bit,” Skadi told them.

The patrol team captain nodded in acknowledgment. Lindworm didn’t belong to Skadi, but the trust she’d earned as the City Council representative was evident.

“Oh.” Skadi had forgotten to take care of one last task.

“Draconess?”

“Mmm...I just remembered something I have to do.”

“Oh? What is it?”

“Well, I’ll do it when I get back. I can finish it quickly. If Glenn did well with Sapphee, then I’ll need to enact a new ordinance.”

“Wh-what?”

Before, Glenn had asked Skadi whether she wanted to live long enough to see how the town turned out. Ever since her heart recovered, Skadi had witnessed all manner of unexpected occurrences.

Just as Dr. Glenn had said, she looked forward to what the future held for Lindworm.

Interlude 02: A Room at the Inn

Souen Litbeit sighed as he returned to the Lindworm Inn.

The innkeeper was human, but he hadn't been very welcoming. This was only to be expected, given that Souen was rumored to be the person who'd spread poison throughout Lindworm. If it weren't for a direct request from the City Council, he wouldn't have been allowed to stay here at all.

Tomorrow, public opinion would change, and Souen would be lauded as one of the people who helped capture the true culprit. Arrangements for Auchraw's arrest were in place. The rest was up to Skadi.

"Welcome back, Mr. Souen."

His maidservant wore a hood as she waited for Souen in his room. She took his jacket; he sank onto the sofa and let out another loud sigh. The sofa was indescribably soft.

"How did it go?" the maidservant asked.

"It'll all be taken care of tomorrow."

The maidservant had brewed green tea she'd brought from the human realm. Souen took a sip and glanced at her. She didn't seem to notice his gaze.

"Now I just have to take care of Glenn."

She didn't reply.

"He's always been so weak. He won't do anything if I don't push him to. It was the same with the Academy. I had to make him want to leave home."

"Surely that was the reason he had a falling-out with your parents."

"I wonder." Souen took another sip of the tea.

He didn't care whether people saw him as the bad guy. Once the facts were revealed later, he could repair misunderstandings. As long as people had a common enemy, they could be persuaded to join forces, like Glenn and Sioux becoming closer through their disdain for their older brother.

"It's the same for Lindworm," Souen continued. "The citizens grow more united if they're busy throwing stones at me."

“And then you’ll do something else to make them hate you.”

“You don’t need to worry about that.”

“I do worry. You’re always so reckless. It drives me crazy.”

“Like I said, it’s not your concern.” Souen was indifferent.

The maidservant said nothing, but she definitely glared at Souen.

“It’s fine,” he said. “I also obtained the pathology reports on Demonitis kept at the Central Hospital.”

“When did you have time for that?”

“Show the reports to those old farts. They’re going to shit bricks.”

“Souen...when you say it like that, you sound twisted.”

“I know. I was joking. It has to be carefully planned out. If I don’t go about it the right way, I’ll just end up throwing human civilization into chaos.”

Souen had gotten the report on Sioux’s Demonitis from the aquatic doctor, Cthulhy. Apparently, Demonitis was a rare condition even in Lindworm—there were ogres in the city, but very few demons—so it was recorded as an interesting case.

Of course, Sioux hadn’t been sick. She was just a human with demon blood. These findings were proof of that.

“I haven’t decided yet whether to commission a paper on this or publish a book. It might be good to have Glenn write a paper. Something like, ‘Human or Demon?’ I’ll keep at it until humans understand that Demonitis isn’t a disease...and that they should allow anyone to get married.”

“Even if that’s true...” The maidservant removed the cloth wrapped around her head. She had the exact same horns as Sioux. “I have no intention of marrying you until you’re no longer at risk.”

“Like I said, don’t worry about it. I’m more anxious about you being seen when you come into this room. If someone found out about our relationship...”

“Please, don’t worry. Horns aren’t uncommon here.”

“Right.”

Souen sighed. Sioux seemed to be doing well in Lindworm. Maybe it would be better for Souen to move here with his Demonitis-stricken fiancée and get married. If he did that, maybe they could forget the hardships of living in the human realm.

That wasn’t the right course of action, though. There weren’t just

humans with Demonitis living in Souen's manor, but also monster subspecies who quietly inhabited the human realm. The woman Souen was in love with—Saki—represented that manor. She was slender, but she had the strength of a demon.

"Why don't you go see the sights of the city?" Souen asked. "This town is friendly to demons."

"If I go, we go together."

"I'm trying to tell you that we can't be seen together."

"Well then, I'll wait until we can."

She was so stubborn. In the human realm, Saki normally couldn't even walk outside, so sightseeing was completely out of the question. There were very few places where she was welcome.

But Souen's feelings for her were real. That was why he'd gone to all this trouble to obtain his sister's medical records. He would use all his power and money to keep Saki safe.

Ever since Souen was a child, he always got everything he wanted.

"Souen..."

"What is it?"

"I hear the bell. There's a bell ringing."

"What?" Souen listened.

He heard it, too. It seemed far away, but it was unmistakably a bell. It sounded...celebratory.

"I wonder if it's coming from the north."

"From the graveyard city?" Souen realized what the bells were for. He'd arranged it, after all. "They say you can't fight blood."

"What do you mean?"

"That my brother and I both have strange fetishes, like snakes and demons."

"Are you trying to make me punch you, Souen?"

"Are you going to turn your future husband into minced meat?"

"If that's what it takes to fix your twisted personality."

"Okay, okay, let's stop. Don't come any closer with that fist. Stop—it was all my fault. I-I'm sorry, Saki. I said...I'm sorry!"

Saki smiled as Souen's voice cracked.

They were in a private room, hidden from everyone. They could

be themselves here, away from their families and any other prying eyes. Just the two of them.

That night, the inn's owner noticed the sound of blows coming from Souen's room. He pretended he didn't hear it.

Epilogue: A Clinic for Two

MASTERMIND OF CANAL-POISONING CASE ARRESTED!

The Lindworm Town Newspaper brings you good news.

Lindworm's patrol team has apprehended the man thought to be the mastermind of the canal poisoning that had the city in an uproar.

Auchraw Dighton, known as a statesman in the human realm, is speculated to have requested that an assassin group poison Lindworm's water because of a grudge against the Draconess, whom he blames for ousting him from power.

Although the amount of poison used did not result in any fatalities, Auchraw is still suspected of attempting a massacre. It was further announced that Auchraw was behind the slave-trade incident that took place in the past. The patrol team will pursue further charges.

Souen Litbeit's efforts were instrumental to Auchraw's arrest. Souen traveled all the way to Lindworm in pursuit of Auchraw, and investigated him in conjunction with the Draconess and patrol team.

Souen, who serves as secretary to the elder statesmen in the human realm, apologized for his superior's actions and is taking control the situation.

In an interview with this paper, Souen stated, "This man, who was once a statesman, used monsters for vile transactions. Furthermore, after being ousted for those activities, he once again tried to attack Lindworm. I would like to deeply apologize to anyone his actions affected. I will make every effort to ensure that something like this never happens again."

WHO EXECUTED THE POISONED-WATER INCIDENT? OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE DRACONESS

Though the canal-poisoning mastermind was captured, the culprit remains at large. Draconess Skadi Dragenfelt made the following announcement regarding the case.

"An assassin group of lamia executed the attack. According to Ms. Saphentite Neikes, pharmacologist at the Litbeit Clinic, the likelihood is high that the suspect is from her clan. However, since the Neikes clan refrained from killing anyone while fulfilling the poisoning request, I've been told it's unlikely that such an incident will occur again. I agree with that statement completely."

Dragonfelt stated, "I will make an official complaint to the head of

the Neikes clan. I will also initiate negotiations to ensure that this sort of incident is not repeated. Both Auchraw, who made the hateful poisoning request, and the Neikes clan are guilty of committing this crime. Most lamia, however, have no connection to the incident, and Ms. Saphentite—who was born into the clan—has dedicated her life to treating patients. I hope that unfounded claims will not spread on the basis of this tenuous connection.”

Although this was the official statement issued by the Draconess, do we really believe that it is acceptable for the culprit to remain at large? We went to the canals to ask whether there was any concern that Ms. Saphentite, who is meant to prescribe medication, is from the same clan as the assassins. We spoke to Lulala Heine, a singer, in the central square.

“What? Concerned?” Miss Lulala said. “Not at all! Sapphee said that it was fine, and Dr. Glenn comes to the canals to check on us every day. My family is alive and well, thanks to them. I will never forgive whoever caused this incident. I want to sink them to the bottom of the sea! But everyone knows that Sapphee is an amazing pharmacologist.”

It seems undeniable that the clinic’s relentless efforts are relieving anxiety about the canals.

SOUEN ACTUALLY GLENN’S BROTHER? THEIR SHOCKING RELATIONSHIP!

In our exclusive investigation into Souen Litbeit, we learned that he is the brother of Dr. Glenn Litbeit of the Litbeit Clinic. While it is true that Glenn and Souen have the same last name, this relationship surprised our reporter.

We also learned that Sioux Litbeit, a member of the Radon District patrol team, is their sister. Sioux served in the arrest of former duke Auchraw Dighton, in what has been revealed to be a joint effort behind the scenes by these three siblings.

Souen will now return to the human realm and discuss the response with statesmen there. This reporter believes that although Lindworm will bear the scars of this incident for years to come, with people like the Litbeits looking out for the city, it won’t be long before we can breathe easy again.

Glenn folded up the town newspaper and put it into his lab coat pocket. They just write what they like without thinking about the people involved, huh? Unlike the bulletin issued by the central City Council, newspaper articles were written by journalists. There was always some truth to their articles, but whenever one was about him, Glenn

found it hard to read calmly.

However, given the complexity of the poisoned-water incident, Sapphee's subsequent exodus, and Souen's visit to Lindworm, he appreciated the newspaper laying things out in a way that residents could understand.

"I'm sorry, Lulala. I really created problems for you."

"No, no. It's fine! You did nothing wrong, Sapphee! I told everyone the truth!"

"Yes..."

"Sapphee, you give me medicine for free. I'm far more grateful for that!"

Sapphee bowed her head.

Glenn put the newspaper article out of his head and bowed to Lulala. "I apologize that a relative of Sapphee's was involved in this incident. I'm very sorry, Lulala."

"Enough! The doctor, too? You didn't do it, did you, Sapphee?! It's fine!" Lulala splashed in the water, telling them to cut it out.

Sapphee and Lulala were close, and Lulala's family were victims of the poison. Glenn and Sapphee had to apologize, but Lulala didn't seem concerned in the least.

"We're all fine now, and the criminal was caught. Illy said that she punished him."

"Oh, really?"

When Sapphee had returned to the Litbeit Clinic, she asked that Skadi make everything public and not hide anything.

"Not even about the clinic?" Skadi had offered.

"I've decided to live as a pharmacologist," Sapphee said. "I'll do everything I can to treat everyone in the canals. So, please, tell the facts exactly as they are."

And so, Skadi revealed everything in a City Council announcement. She also vouched for Sapphee's innocence.

"But are you sure about the rest?" Lulala asked.

"Mm-hmm. The City Council and Central Hospital provided the funds, and all subsequent treatment will be free. The amount that you already paid will be refunded as well. It'll take some time, but you'll definitely get it back."

Due to the hefty income gap among the canals' residents, many patients required financial aid. The Litbeit Clinic was leading victim

support; however, the clinic didn't have the financial capacity to prepare all the medication for free. So, the City Council and the Central Hospital—Skadi and Cthulhy—had stepped in to offer them loans.

In other words, Glenn and Sapphee had taken on a significant amount of debt. That was the Litbeit Clinic's way of setting things right. Since they had decided to spend their lives together, Sapphee's problems were Glenn's problems as well.

Well, I guess it'll be a little longer before I'm on my own.

It didn't make sense for Glenn to become a hospital director while in debt. He figured his clinic could remain under Cthulhy's umbrella for a bit, which meant his master-pupil relationship with Cthulhy would also remain unchanged.

"Okay, thank you," said Lulala. "Everyone will be very happy to hear that."

"Good. Lulala, have you noticed any problems? Are you okay? The poison may have affected you."

"Well, uh, I'm fine, but..." Lulala's face turned red. She looked back and forth between Glenn and Sapphee, as if she didn't know what to say or to whom. Glenn wasn't oblivious enough to miss the meaning in her eyes. Lulala had told him to wait two years before deciding to marry anyone.

"Are you two going to get married?"

"Lulala, I'm sorry." Sapphee looked down as she spoke. "The other day, Dr. Glenn officially proposed to me. I don't know when the wedding will be, but someday, we'll become husband and wife."

Glenn had suggested that they wait to get married until the clinic was running smoothly again. Skadi and Cthulhy had offered them a reasonable interest rate, but it would still take years to pay back the loans they'd taken out. If free treatment for the poisoned-water incident was Sapphee's way of setting things right, then waiting to be married until they could afford a splendid sign for the clinic was Glenn's.

"I'm sorry, Lulala. I know you had your eye on Dr. Glenn, too."

"Er, yeah. But I can't get married yet... Is everything okay?"

"Yes. No matter what happens, Glenn and I will overcome it together."

"No, no! That's not what I'm talking about! Didn't you read the town newspaper?"

“Huh?”

Neither Glenn nor Sapphee knew what Lulala meant. Sensing their confusion, Lulala dove into the water. She immediately popped back up, holding a newspaper encased in glass so it could be read underwater.

“This! Look at this!”

“I just read it,” Glenn said. “It was mainly about the poisoned-water incident.”

“No, here! Look—it’s written in the corner!”

They looked at the headline Lulala pointed to. It was small, but it described a new ordinance passed in Lindworm. Sapphee stretched her long body and read the text out loud.

“‘Amendment to an ordinance: certain insect monsters and hybrid beast monsters have suggested that there is an issue with Lindworm’s monogamy laws. In response, the Draconess has proposed the legalization of polygamy to the City Council. It passed with a majority vote.’”

“Huh?” said Glenn. “Just a minute, Sapphee.”

“This means that Lindworm will allow plural marriage!” Sapphee cried. Tourists in the canal turned their heads. Sapphee didn’t even notice, just thumped her tail loudly. “Whaaaat?! Why...why?!”

“Umm...” Lulala looked embarrassed. “This means that...I still have a chance, right?”

“And, of course, it means that I *also* have the right to marry Glenn!” Tisalia Scythia appeared with a singsong laugh. In her hand was a marriage certificate. Tisalia had already filled it out with her and Glenn’s names; all it needed was Glenn’s signature.

“Interspecies marriage in Lindworm is tricky,” Tisalia said. “Especially for monsters from different cultures. Abolishing the monogamous system was really the only solution, so this amendment is great news! Don’t you think, Sapphee?”

“Tisalia...you...”

“You won’t try to say that this marriage certificate is null now, will you? Aren’t you the one who provided this to me?”

“Yes...well...umm...” Sapphee buried her face in her hands.

“You said you’d entrust the doctor to either me or Arahnia.”

“Yes, I did say that. Before I left the clinic. But—”

“Am I misunderstanding this contract’s contents?”

“At the time, I thought I’d never come back.” *Why has it come to this?* Sapphee lamented.

“Hey, Tisalia, just a minute,” Glenn said. “I already asked Sapphee—”

“Doctor, there’s also already someone in Lindworm whom I like and to whom I am betrothed. Such excuses no longer mean anything.”

“Hrm...” It was true. Under this new law, Glenn could have more than one wife. This meant that any reason he had for not marrying Tisalia had disappeared.

The idea that there could be no more than one “love of your life” was only commonplace among humans and monsters who practiced monogamy. The seal-skinned selkies had polygamous, harem-like arrangements, while many insect monsters lived in societies where the woman in charge took multiple husbands. Conversion to monogamy would’ve been a strange prospect for any of them.

“Arggh!” To Sapphee, this transformation of values felt like a direct attack. Her desire to keep her lover to herself, to be his one and only, was no longer Lindworm’s default.

“By the way, Arahnia will stop by later,” Tisalia added. “She says she has no problem being the third wife.”

“Tisalia...you already knew, didn’t you?” asked Sapphee. “Your father, Hephthal, has a powerful position on the City Council.”

“I’ve heard rumblings about this amendment before, but it was still being discussed. What difference does it make, Sapphee? You can’t deny that *you* gave us the marriage certificates and told Glenn to choose one of us. *I* made no such suggestion. Isn’t that right?” Tisalia’s gaze was unwavering.

“Um...er...” Sapphee hemmed and hawed.

Glenn frowned. *The only way to turn Tisalia down now would be to say, “I don’t like you.” But...* But that would be insincere.

He didn’t dislike Tisalia or Arahnia at all. They were both attractive women, and Sapphee hadn’t put their names on the marriage certificates for no reason. A part of Glenn thought that if polygamy could make everyone happy, it might be the best option. He was surprised to discover that he had such an enormous capacity for love.

Following his heart was probably the correct thing to do here.

“Okay, fine. I got it.” Sapphee sighed. “The new system permits polygamy. There’s no use arguing anymore. I’ll at least admit that it’s an engagement.”

“Yay! Doctor, how about a wedding ceremony?”

“Wait a second. Even *I* won’t be marrying him for quite some time. I’ll be his first wife, so you can’t marry him before I do.”

“Oh—now that there’s room for more than one wife, we have to discuss who will be first and second? Aren’t you being a little greedy, Sapphee?”

“I’ll never give up my place to anyone!”

“Umm, I’m currently in a large amount of debt,” Glenn said. “I want to pay it back through the clinic. Until I achieve that, please forget about marrying me.”

“Come to think of it, my father did say...” Tisalia replied. “But I can pay back such a debt myself.”

“I’m sorry, but I’d prefer not to rely on you for this, Tisalia.”

“O-oh, is that right? But, please, tell me if there’s something I *can* help you with.” Tisalia put her hand on his chest in understanding. “Sapphee and I are both your fiancées now. If we’re going to become your wives, try to be open with us.”

“Don’t forget that *I’m* the only one who got a proposal.” Sapphee looked quite irritated.

Tisalia’s smiling face hardened. “Wh-what did you say? I’m so jealous!”

“It’s only natural. I’m the first wife. Glenn told me at Deadlich Hotel that I was the only one!”

“If that’s the case, then, Doctor, please speak loving words to me, too! Whisper in my ear, ‘I love you, Tisalia!’ If my ear’s too high up, you can get on my back!”

“Tee hee hee! You sound so desperate.”

“At least call me Second Wife!”

They were growing quite loud.

Glenn was used to this kind of scene, however. It was only because these two were such good friends that they were able to quarrel like this. He could relax, enjoy it, and relish the fact that Sapphee had come back.

“Tee hee! Doc.”

He suddenly felt four arms embrace him. Their owner was so close he could feel her breath on his ear.

“Oh—Arahnia.”

“Excuse me for intruding. Nothing good comes from two women

bickering, eh, Doc? Why don't we go get a cup of something?"

"Hey! No escaping!"

"That's right!"

"Oh, look! You guys finally agree on something." Even as Sapphee and Tisalia threw accusations her way, Arahnia didn't loosen her grip. Instead, she squeezed all four arms tighter, as if indicating that she would never let Glenn go.

"Doc, you'll make me your wife, too, right?"

"Err, umm..."

"It's fine. Sapphee and Tisalia can be your priorities. Tee hee! I'll be happy to let you have your way with me."

"Er..."

"Wait a second, Arahnia. If you want to marry him, get in line!"

"That's right! We need to come up with a system to decide who gets to spend time with the doctor!"

"That's why I'm saying that he can save me for later!" Arahnia handed Glenn something. "Here."

It was a bunch of letters from different senders. Farm owner Aluloona, graveyard city manager Molly, Dione from the mountaintop, and Tisalia's attendants Kay and Lorna. They all lived in Lindworm, and Glenn had examined each of them.

"Uh, what are these?" Glenn asked.

"They're marriage applications. Illy told me to bring them if I went to the clinic."

Wasn't that Illy's job? Wait—that wasn't the important thing here.

"Tee hee hee! Thanks to this new plural-marriage system, the bar has lowered. Aluloona probably has a hundred suitors of her own lined up. Oh, my handsome husband-to-be, you're going to have an interesting time of it now." Arahnia seemed to enjoy the commotion she'd caused.

"I'll screen these!" Sapphee grabbed the letters. "Dione's is just a message to say hello. Ugh! But Molly included a marriage certificate! Why are Kay and Lorna sending the doctor love poems?! I won't allow them to sleep with their boss's husband! They're just messing with me! Oh, there's also a letter from Memé. She's asking if you'll order the engagement ring at the workshop. She's always thinking about business."

This was exactly what Glenn wanted for his clinic. Compared to the quiet when Sapphee was gone, this racket was heaven.

“Let’s start by sorting these letters! You can’t have too many wives, Dr. Glenn! You’re no longer allowed to just talk to anyone you choose!”

“I never did that in the first place. C’mon, let’s start the afternoon exams.”

The waiting room was already full of patients. Tisalia and Arahnia seemed conscious of this, and had therefore visited during lunch. Tisalia returned the letters, and Arahnia released her grasp on Glenn. They both had their own jobs to do, too.

“Even if I get married, I’m still a doctor,” Glenn said.

“I know. And I’ll be by your side forever as your pharmacologist.” Sapphee smiled.

That smile meant everything to Glenn. It was why he’d gone to get her when Souen nudged him. It was so obvious now.

Why had it taken him so long to realize?



A meeting was taking place in Cthulhy's office at the Lindworm Central Hospital.

"What aid did the Central Hospital provide?"

"Three hundred pieces of gold. And the City Council?"

"The same. Of course, the loan is considered public welfare, so it's interest-free, with no payment deadline. I also told Glenn that the City Council was willing to shoulder the debt."

"But he refused, right? Unbelievable. Glenn and Sapphee are both so stubborn."

Cthulhy's friend, City Council representative Skadi Dragenfelt, was drinking herbal tea on the sofa. Her guard, Kunai, was also present.

There was one final person in attendance. "I can loan them the entire amount," she said.

"Glenn will refuse. He and Sapphee said that this is how they'll make amends."

"They're hopeless. I wish that young people would be more open-minded. They're always so quick to suffer for pride and honor. They should learn from me!"

"Aluloona, you should have more pride."

"People can't live off pride." The farm owner Aluloona declared as she nursed a cup of herbal tea balanced on her flowers.

Skadi rubbed the horns protruding from her forehead as she listened to the second-most powerful person on the City Council. Aluloona discarded all dignity when it came to mating.

"Unbelievable." Cthulhy remained calm as she looked over the statements. "Just as I was getting ready to pass on my hospital duties to Glenn... I can't do that now that he's taken on so much debt."

"You look happy with the arrangement, Cthulhy. Aren't you glad that your pupil is still under your protection? You're so overbearing."

"That's not true. I want to quit my role as dean and do research in the deep sea." Cthulhy sighed heavily.

Skadi smiled. "Glenn really prefers the clinic. Perhaps because he wants to be under the same roof as Sapphee? Everyone has their own destiny. Maybe Glenn's place is in the clinic."

"In other words, you want me to work harder. You're trying to

say that the dean's chair suits me, Skadi?"

"I would never say that." Skadi laughed.

Cthulhy always said that she wanted to quit, but she never lifted her pen from her paperwork. She had her own destiny.

"That's right," said Aluloona. "You guys get to work. Enrich Lindworm. There will be more citizens, and more children born. The city will become even more prosperous."

"You need to work harder, too, Aluloona."

"Tee hee hee!"

Skadi looked annoyed, but Aluloona just blew off Cthulhy's words. She was like a tree that stood firm and unbowed despite strong winds.

"I *am* working," she said. "To help inaugurate the new plural-marriage system, I sent love letters to hundreds of potential grooms. I wonder how many will respond?"

"Hey, Aluloona! You sent one to Glenn, too, didn't you?" asked Cthulhy. "Knock it off, will you? It's as though you have no criteria whatsoever!"

"Like you're in a position to talk, with the way you go after the young men! The master of the clinic decided on his own bride, didn't he?"

"You're crazy!"

"That's enough. Stop your bickering; I'm trying to enjoy my tea." Skadi glanced up at the women.

Tentacles and vines intertwined. It looked as if a battle might break out at any moment, but the dean's office was far too small for that. Both Aluloona and Cthulhy sighed at the Draconess's admonishment and resumed just staring at each other.

"Honorable Representative, aren't you going to pursue the popular young lord?" Aluloona asked. Kunai was silent by her side, but her face was pained.

Skadi's feelings weren't as well hidden as she thought. Glenn was just one of many young men she was interested in. She didn't want to live her life married to one person.

However, the Draconess thought it might be nice to experience something like that for a short time.

"I wonder," she said. "You're all from species that live for a long time, but Glenn is human. That must be frightening for him."

“Do fire dragons care about such things?”

“I want to honor everyone. Especially Lindworm’s residents. If I joined the competition for Glenn’s affections, it would only fan the flames. There are many tales of royals who brought their countries to ruin in the name of love. The heat of love can easily turn to war.” Skadi sipped her tea. “So, I’ll just snatch him up when I decide I really want him.”

“His wives will be angry.”

“It doesn’t matter. I’m a dragon. I say what I want, when I want it, and take it for myself.”

“Dragons have horrible manners,” Aluloona said.

“He’s my pupil. If you treat him like a toy and break him, I won’t forgive you.”

“I’m sorry, Cthulhy. I don’t think he’s a toy. Glenn and the others are important citizens of Lindworm. I’m prepared to love them to my heart’s content.”

Skadi tried to imagine looking down on Lindworm from the sky. She wondered what the view from up there was like. Her body had gradually recovered since the surgery, but flying was still a dream, albeit an attainable one.

“I’ll watch you, Brother.”

She said this quietly, so no one else could hear, to the one man she had even a bit of interest in.

“Draconess, please restrain yourself.” It seemed that her loyal flesh golem heard. Kunai’s expression suggested that she was both disgusted and pleased with her leader’s selfish comments.

Skadi shrugged her wings as if to say, *Okay, fine.*

Within the only medical clinic in a city where humans and monsters coexisted, a doctor and a pharmacologist worked side by side, indispensable to each other.

“Next, please.”

The clinic bell never stopped ringing.

Sometimes a centaur came bearing gifts, and sometimes an arachne came to show off a new outfit she made. Even a dragon visited from time to time. A cyclops delivered medical tools, a harpy delivered letters, and a corpse occasionally dropped by.

These were the monsters that surrounded the doctor.

What sorts of ailments would he treat today?

Afterword

Hello, I'm Yoshino Origuchi.

I'd like to start off by telling you something important. Are you ready? I'm going to say it loud. Here I go...

THIS IS NOT THE LAST VOLUME!!!

I apologize for the large font. But seriously, though I think Glenn's finally settled down a bit—both physically and emotionally—the story will go on. Actually, my editor's trying to rush me to finish Volume 7. I'm grateful, but it's not easy. I'm breathing hard.

There are still so many monsters I haven't written about yet. Another of my works—*Monster Girl Hunter: All the Monster Girls are my Wives!*—will be published by Dengeki Bunko. Even if I have trouble coming up with new ailments for Glenn to examine, I never run out of things to write about the different monster-girl species, so it's been really fun.

I'd now like to express my gratitude. To my editor, Hibi-u-san, who always watches over me—thank you. Despite everything we've got going on, Hibi-u-san suggested we start on Volume 7, so now I feel like I'm being put through my paces. I'm doing my best, though!

Z-ton-sensei, thank you very much for your illustrations. The cover represents the theme of each book, and Z-ton drew it slightly differently this time around. That's something he can do because he's been here for the entire series. It's all thanks to Z-ton that we were able to make it to Volume 6.

To Thomas Kanemaki from Comicalize—there have been so many reprints of the manga, and I'm really happy with how it's going. I'm sure I'll continue to send you more books that are nearly impossible to transform into manga, so thanks for your patience!

Thank you to all the artists who talk to me—manga artists and illustrators on Twitter, S-BOW, the owner of Jingai Only, and the entire staff. Thank you to everyone working at bookstores throughout the country. Thank you to the *Comic Ryu* reps and editorial staff, and my family, whom I haven't seen much since I left home. Thank you to the proofreaders who find every teeny-tiny mistake, and to all of you readers. I'm forever grateful.

I'm working hard on the next volume, so please look forward to it. I think it might have a vampire in it to suuuck your bloooood.

About the Author, Yoshino Origuchi

I somehow made it to Volume 6 of this series with nothing but monster girls in mind. That is, of course, all thanks to those of you who love monster girls, too.

Thanks very much for your continued support.

About the Illustrator, Z-ton

I've been really into bagel sandwiches lately. There's not a lot of fat in them, so they feel healthy and delicious. I've also been tossing a lot of things into the rice cooker, trying out some culinary R&D...but I've been failing miserably.



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